ADVICE // SITES
TECHNOLOGY //

EXCLUSIVE! 113 ISPs tested

internet magazine

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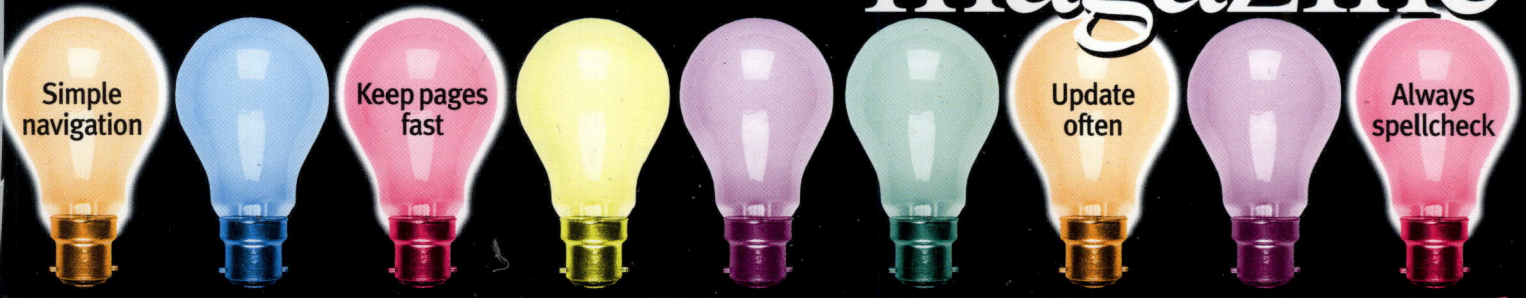
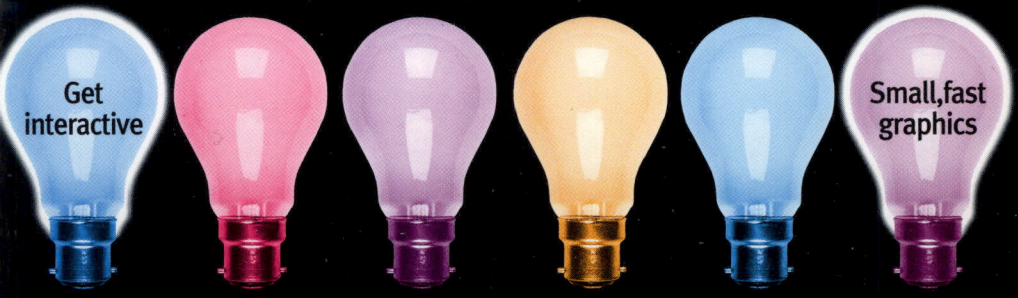


BE INSPIRED!

74 Great new design ideas to help you build a perfect Web site
Expert tips & tricks • The sites to watch • The best software



Dreamweaver 3 and Fireworks 3 reviewed

Download sites on test

Add 3D images to your site

An Emap Active Publication

WATCH WHAT YOU'RE DOING!

Why you should be careful how you use the Net at work page 68

03
9 771355 642054

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connecting...

internet magazine

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Oil Paint
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Image
Objects
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ealth information on the Internet
Choose a language
Site Guide
Feedback on this site
Healthcare Guide
Conditions & Treatment
About NHS Direct
A-Z Guide to the NHS
Welcome to NHS Direct Online
Information on the latest UK health stories
Ideas and suggestions for improving your health and avoiding disease
An easy to use guide to coping with 20 common health problems at home
Information on illnesses, disabilities, treatments and where to go for help
Reference guide to how the NH works and services provided
NHS Direct Online
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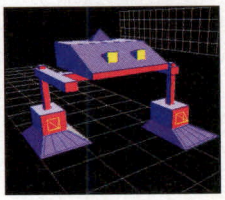

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We find the UK's best performing Web hosting companies in our tests

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Editor'swelcome

In the spotlight

Welcome to the March issue of *Internet Magazine*, packed full of expert advice, the latest technology and the best sites. You'll find everything you need to get the most out of your time online.

We can always tell when the Net's a hot news topic. The phones don't stop ringing, there's a sudden rush of requests to appear on the telly and radio, and other journalists are desperate for quotes.

We seem to be more popular than ever this month. It's great to see the Internet grabbing the public's attention, and for most of the right reasons.

Thankfully, the rest of the media is realising that people want to know about Internet freedom, the best ISPs, how to shop online and where to get music on the Web. They don't just want to read stories about the 'evil' Internet – with its child pornographers, terrorists and hackers bent on world destruction.

Meanwhile, back in this month's issue, you'll find the best Web design advice to improve your efforts online. We've persuaded the UK's top professionals to give us their expert tips for building brilliant Web sites. Our exclusive Web design guide starts on page 48.

Other highlights include our feature on the revolutionary Linux platform, a labs test of the best download sites, a guide to all things French and our spotlight on Government Web sites.

Tanya Kreisky
Assistant Editor
tanyak@internet.emap.com

Martyn Moore is on secondment, working on an internal Emap project. Tanya Kreisky has full editorial responsibility for *Internet Magazine*.

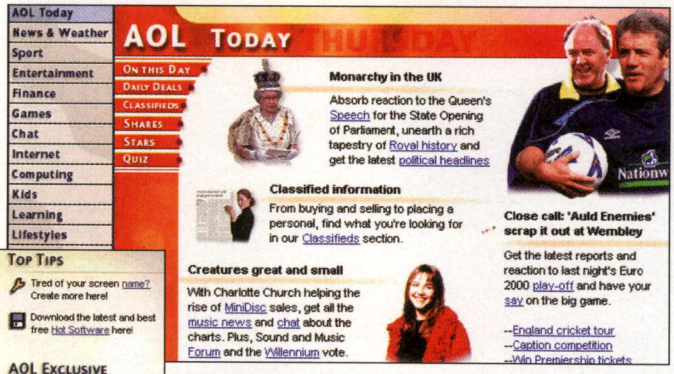
internet magazine is committed to bringing you the best in Net software every month...

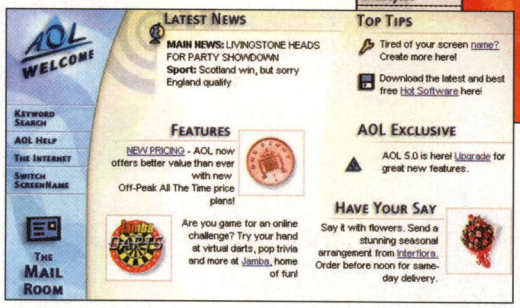
Get the best from

AOL New Version 5.0

Try the Internet completely FREE for 10 hours... with no Internet phone bill

AOL has always made the Internet easy to understand and easier to access. And we've just made it even easier, because we've introduced our simplest pricing structure. When you opt for our unlimited access plan – just £9.99 a month – all your Internet call charges are just 1p a minute, whatever time you log on: day, night, weekday or weekend. What's more, for a limited period, if you sign up now you'll get 10 hours of AOL access, including Internet phone calls, for absolutely nothing.





Your FREE AOL trial gives you:

- **No Internet phone bill**
- **FREE 10 hour trial**
- **FREE customer support**
- **FREE parental control**

Getting started on the Net is easy with the world's number one service provider. All you need is a PC, a modem, and a phone line. And, of course, your free 10 hour trial.

AOL gives full Net access as well as 17 exclusive channels covering everything from news and sport to travel and entertainment, to entertain you and your children.

What's new about AOL 5.0 software?

With our limited offer you get the chance to try the all new AOL 5.0 software, which brings you enhanced easy to use features plus great online areas.

Not only can you add colours and graphics to your emails, you can now personalise them by adding your own signature to the bottom and retrieve deleted emails within 24 hours.

AOL version 5.0 supports ISDN and Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0, and allows you to connect at speeds up to 64kbps. Install the software on the CD and you're less than five minutes away from your first Net experience!

A sample of what awaits...

There's so much online you'll be spoilt for choice! Before you start, try our quick guide to making the most of your free trial: Connie's Guide to AOL (Keyword: CONNIE). Connie will give you great advice on all our services, plus the benefits you can only get with AOL. And remember, you can return at any time for more hints and tips!

Get acquainted with Keywords – they let you get to the area you want faster! Just type the keyword you want to go to into the address bar and hit return. Or press Ctrl + K and type the keyword in the box. After that you can find out how to set up your email addresses, (Keyword: NAMES) send your first email, surf the Web – even send an instant message!

Educate, entertain and protect your kids

Set up your parental controls to protect your kids' access to the Net (Keyword: PARENTAL CONTROLS). You set the limits for which AOL and Internet areas your kids visit, so they can play safely. You can block types of access to the Net, such as downloads from newsgroups or specific chat rooms, and you can restrict email sent and received.

Disclaimer

Please note: manufacturers will not support demo software and you install these programs on your machine at your own risk. We have tested them for viruses and corruption, and at time of shipping these all checked out fine.

***Internet Magazine* and EMAP Active cannot be held responsible for any problems arising from their use, or for the failure of any programs to run correctly.**

You'll find most of the software on this CD is shareware. Shareware developers put in a lot of work for little return and you should register software you continue to use after the evaluation period. Charges for shareware are usually very modest and registration entitles you to customer support and free or cheap upgrades.

Using your CD

The CD's interface is written in HTML, which means you can open it in any browser. Just open your browser, select File Open, access your CD drive and load the file index.htm.

If you don't have a browser, fear not. We've thoughtfully included the latest versions of Netscape Communicator and Internet Explorer on the CD for Windows 9.x/NT4 and the Mac. You'll find them in the Browser section on your CD.

ALL the support you need – FREE

Get free answers to your online questions from our customer support team, either online or via our freephone number – (0800) 376 5432. Whether you need help with technical issues or simply just want to know more about your account, the AOL Customer Support team is dedicated to making your online experience a happy one. (Keyword: HELP).

So go on – sign up now for your FREE AOL trial!

Free e-commerce software from Secure Trading

Find out how you can benefit from having credit card processing on your company Web site with a presentation from UK Service Provider, SecureTrading.

your free cover CD

This month's must-have software

Site building

Elated Web Kits Exclusive Free Web site templates that you can customise (Win/Mac)
CoffeeCup HTML Editor Popular HTML editor (W9x/NT4)
Dreamweaver Trial version Professional Web development tool (W9x/NT4/Mac)
HoTMetaL Pro Versatile Web site creator (W9x/NT4)
SmartSite HTML editor and validator (W9x/NT)
ImageSite Pro Thumbnail creator and HTML generator (W9x)
BanMan Create banner ads (W9x/NT)
GoMenu Add menus to your pages (W9x/NT)
Canoma Demo version Build effective 3D worlds (W9x/NT)
Shout3D Trial version Create, publish and view 3D objects (W9x/NT)
HTML Compare Find changes in different versions of HTML pages and Web sites (W9x/NT)
HTML Editor Freeware HTML editor (W9x)
SurfMap JavaScript 30-day trial Create elegant Web site navigation systems (W9x/NT)
Scribbler 2000 A JavaScript, VBScript and DHTML editor (W9x/NT)
Dutch's Cascading Style Sheets Control your site's appearance (W9x/NT)
TopStyle Evaluation version Create cross-browser style sheets (W9x/NT)
GoLive Trial version Slick Web site development tool (W9x/NT/Mac)
Arachnophilia Windows 95 to HTML converter (W9x/NT)
Cool Page Shareware Web page design tool (W9x/NT)
Style Master Control style sheets (W9x/NT/Mac)
WebSpeed Optimizer Trial version See your site as others see it (W9x/NT)
Applet Button Factory Create clever buttons (W9x/NT4)
Applet Navigation Factory Better site navigation (W9x/NT)
Pagespinner Full-featured text editor (Mac)
Wallaby Versatile Web editor (Mac)
MacTidy Freeware Fix your HTML mistakes automatically
Big Brother Keep an eye on your links (Mac)
HTML Optimizer Remove unnecessary characters and tags (Mac)
Freeway 30-day trial Create stunning sites (Mac)
OptimaHTML Reduces the size of Web pages (Mac)
Injection Pro 15-day demo Get higher site rankings (Mac)

Great Graphics

Paint Shop Pro New version Top graphics program (W9x/NT)
Fireworks 30-day trial Professional graphics package (W9x/NT/Mac)
ULead WebRazor Pro Trial version Web tools (W9x)
Image Optimizer Trial version Shrik graphics (W9x/NT)
IrfanView Image file viewer (W9x/NT)
GIFmation GIF animation application (Mac)
A Smaller GIF Shrink your animated GIFs (Mac)
Graphic Converter Does exactly what it says on the box (Mac)
ProJPEG Prepare your pics for the Web (Mac)

For your toolkit

WebPosition Gold 30-day trial Get your Web site a top 10 search engine ranking (W9x/NT4)
ConSeal Private Desktop Firewall aimed at non-technical users (W9x)
Server 2000 Anonymous Web browsing (W9x)
Web Trends Enterprise Suite Trial version eBusiness management solution (NT)
Analog Analyse Web server logfiles (W9x/NT/Mac)
NeoTrace 30-day trial Get info on failed connections (W9x/NT)
CuteFTP File transfer application (W9x/NT4)
GetRight Recover your downloaded file errors (w3.x/W9x/NT/Mac)
Callwait Trial version Detect incoming phone calls while you're on the Nt(W9x)
CoffeeCup Direct FTP FTP client (W9x/NT)
DirectX Multimedia extension for Windows (W95)
Adobe Acrobat Reader Lets you view PDFs (W9x/Mac)**WinZip** Evaluation version Compression software (W9x/NT/Win3.x)
WinZip Evaluation version Compression software (W9x/NT/Win3.x)
Vbrun Visual Basic runtime libraries (Win 95)
Stuffit Expander Top archive unpacker (Mac)
VSE Be Found Submits sites to search engines (Mac)

Centernet 15-day trial Submit your site to popular search engines (Mac)
MacWasher 30-day trial Clean up your Mac's history (Mac)
Vremya Sets your clock from the Net (Mac)
NetChronometer Synchronises your clock (Mac)
SiteRanger Copy your site onto your local drive (Mac)
Anarchie Pro New version Popular FTP tool (Mac)
Download Deputy 30-day trial Set up batch downloads (Mac)
OT/PPP Strip Switch connections from your Control Strip (Mac)
Mac OS Runtime for Java Run Java applications and applets (Mac)
MRJ Run Java applications and applets (Mac)

Just browsing

Cortona VRML Client 3Dplug-in for the Web (W9x)
Viscape SVR Plug-in for Netscape, ActiveX control for IE (W9x)
Copernic 2000 Search the Web, newsgroups and email simultaneously (W9x/NT4)
Zip Up The Web View Web pages offline (W9x/NT4)
Neoplanet 5 Rebadged version of Explorer (W9x)
WebWasher Block banner ads and popup windows (W9x/NT)
Netscape Communicator 4.7 New version (W9x/Mac)
Opera Fast and simple browser (W9x/NT)
Internet Explorer 5 New version (W9x/NT4)
Internet Explorer 4.5.1 New version (Mac)
Pagesucker Download entire sites (Mac)
Web Devil View Web pages offline (Mac)

Enhanced email

Mail Filter for AOL 20-day trial (W9x)
Spam Buster Spammer addresses to block (W9/NT)
Pegasus Mail New version Free email client (Win3.x)
Spam Solution Encrypts your email addresses (Win)
E-mail Cleaner Cleans up email and newsgroup texts (Mac)
Mail Convert Convert your Web site form submissions into a usable text file format (Mac)
LetterRip Pro 30-day trial Set up mailing lists (Mac)
Pegasus Mail New version Free email client (W3x/Mac)

Multimedia

Sound Forge XP Feature-rich audio tool (W9x/NT)
Koan MP3 plug-in for the Web (W9x/NT)
Sonique Windows audio player (W9x/NT)
RealJukeBox Play and record music (W9x/NT4)
RealPlayer G2 Media player (W9x/NT/Mac)
WinAmp Free version MPEG audio player(W9x/NT)
Audio Catalyst Trial version Audio ripper and encoder (W9x)
Flash 4 30-day trial Create interactive multimedia content (W9x/NT4/Mac)
Shockwave 7.0.2 Play Director and Flash media (W3.x/W9x/NT4/Mac)
Apple QuickTime Multimedia software and plug-in (W3.x/W9x/NT4/Mac)
Animation Maker Web animation software (Mac)
MacTuner 20-day trial Find broadcasts on the Internet (Mac)
Macast 15-day trial MP3 and audio CD player (Mac)

Extra bits

Instant Rendezvous Free version Talk to people on the same Web page (W9x/NT)
Chat Nanny Monitor chat areas (W9x/NT)
Screen Loupe Magnification tool (W9x/NT)
Cyberpatrol Control which sites the family can view (Mac)
ICQ beta Instant messaging program (Mac)

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With the increasing pace of change in the world of the web, it is easy to feel left out and left behind. But now the right sort of help is at hand.

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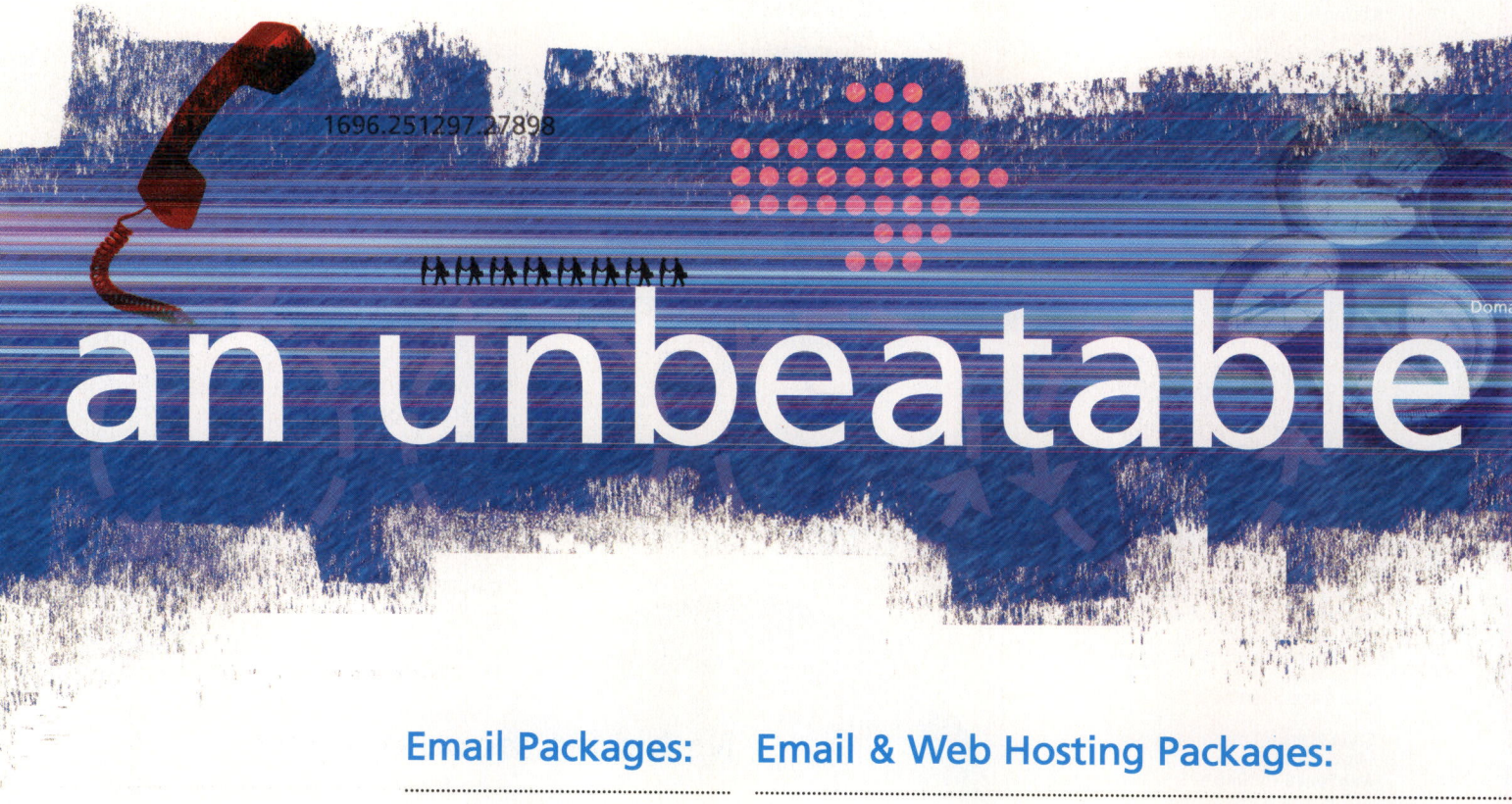
Freephone: 0808 100 6200 www.magic-moments.com



Email & Web Hosting Packages:

All our Email and Web Hosting packages also include: domain name registration or transfer, daily backups, Smart UPS and technical support.

ALL packages come with FREE Internet connection which benefits Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children.

Email Packages:

Magic EBasic **£40pa**
- Unlimited Email addresses
- Single Email routing

Price excludes naming authority fees

Magic EPlus **£75pa**
- Unlimited Email addresses
- 10 POP Email boxes
- Remote control panel via web interface
- Multiple Email routing

Price excludes naming authority fees

Email & Web Hosting Packages:

Magic SoHo **£130pa**
- 30 MB web/hosting space
- Unlimited Email addresses
- Single Email routing
- Full FTP access and personal CGI-BIN
- Remote control panel via web interface
- Full graphical site statistics

Price excludes naming authority fees

Magic Standard **£155pa**
- 50MB web/hosting space
- Unlimited Email addresses
- 10 POP Email boxes
- Multiple Email routing
- Full FTP access and personal CGI-BIN
- Remote control panel via web interface
- Full graphical site statistics

Price excludes naming authority fees

New NT Hosting Solutions:

Simply add the price below to any of our web hosting packages:

NT Frontpage	**£50pa**
NT Frontpage, Access, ASP, CGI	**£180pa**
NT Frontpage, SQL, ASP, CGI	**£330pa**

Transfer your domain name to our network and start saving today!

MAGIC MOMENTS

Our business is to serve you

Magic Moments Internet plc
Email: enquiries@magic-moments.com/
Terms: http://www.magic-moments.com/terms/

No hidden set up charges!

Magic from the Heart £195pa

Special Package

- 75 MB web/hosting space
- Unlimited Email addresses
- 15 POP Email boxes
- Multiple Email routing
- Unlimited Email autoresponders
- Full FTP access and personal CGI-BIN
- Remote control panel via web interface
- Full graphical site statistics

Price excludes naming authority fees

£10 from this package is contributed to charitable causes. Charities include: NSPCC, Great Ormond Street Hospital, Imperial Cancer Trust. Details: http://www.magic-moments.com/charity/

Registered Charity No: 235825

Magic Enterprise £255pa

- 100 MB web/hosting space
- Unlimited Email addresses
- 20 POP Email boxes
- Multiple Email routing
- Unlimited Email autoresponders
- SSL secure server
- Full FTP access and personal CGI-BIN
- Remote control panel via web interface
- Full graphical site statistics

Price excludes naming authority fees

E-commerce Services

E-commerce solutions (including SSL)	from £65 pa

Other Services

Additional web/hosting space (10MB)	£25 pa
Database facilities	from £200 pa
Filemaker Pro database hosting	from £200 pa

Naming Authority Fees

UK domains (.co.uk, .org.uk)	£5
Global domains (.com, .org, .net)	£45
Ireland domain (.ie)	£95

Based on two years fees. Fees are subject to change without notice due to fluctuations in exchange rates.

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The year of the merger?

Minister considering regulatory legislation

The UK Government is considering relaxing regulatory legislation on broadcasting and the Internet in the light of the $350 billion merger of AOL with Time Warner and its subsequent deal with UK record label, EMI.

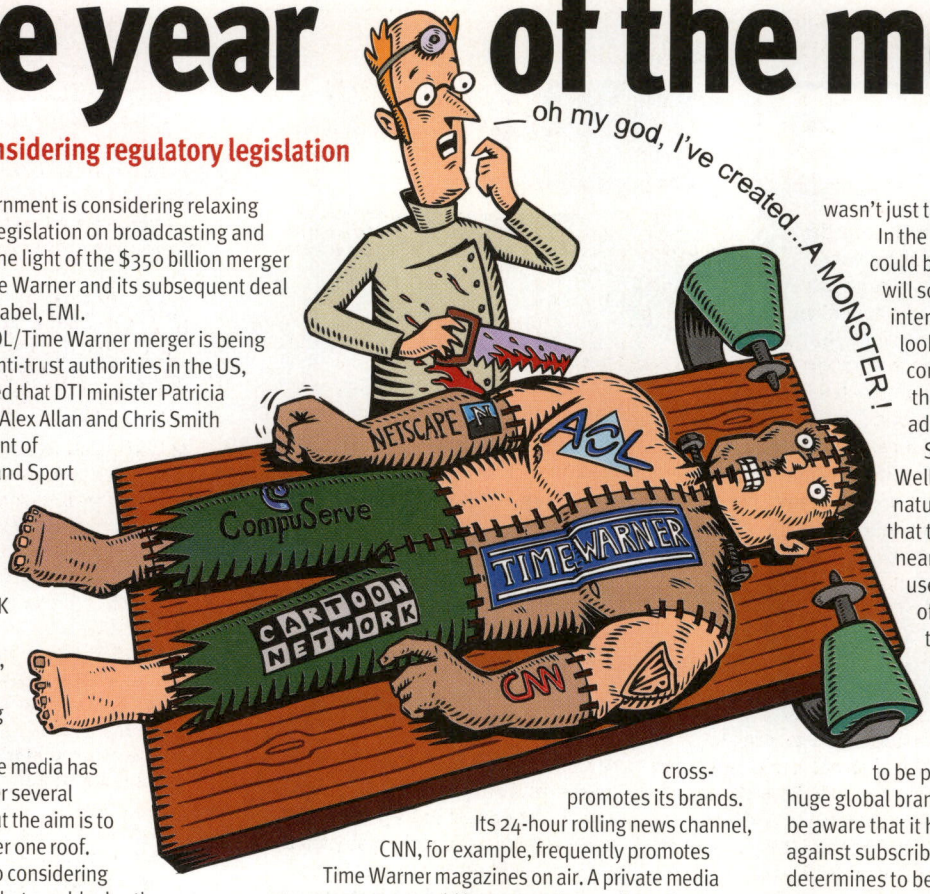
While the AOL/Time Warner merger is being scrutinised by anti-trust authorities in the US, it's been revealed that DTI minister Patricia Hewitt, e-envoy Alex Allan and Chris Smith of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport have met to discuss how the Government will react to other possible UK mergers.

Traditionally, Government decision-making about the Net, telecoms and the media has been spread over several departments, but the aim is to bring these under one roof.

Hewitt is also considering new legislation that would relax the Government's regulatory grip on these sectors.

"As markets converge, it is important that we allow the market to find answers and only intervene where none are forthcoming," said Hewitt.

This is a radical shift in thinking for the Government. Even before the mergers with AOL and EMI, Time Warner was a media titan. Its empire spans cable TV, the Internet, films, music and magazines. The company also frequently cross-promotes its brands.



Its 24-hour rolling news channel, CNN, for example, frequently promotes Time Warner magazines on air. A private media company would have never been allowed to gain such dominance in the UK.

It's clear that 2000 could be the year of consolidation. While newspaper reports of the AOL/Time Warner merger have focused primarily on Time Warner as a content provider, little has been mentioned about its broadband service. Warner runs one of the most technologically advanced cable/telephone networks in the US with over 13 million subscribers. It's clear that it wasn't just the content that AOL was after.

In the UK, NTL, Telewest and Chello could be on the hunt for content. Each will soon launch fledgling broadband interactive TV services and could be looking to snap up media companies. Exclusive content for their services would give them added advantage over their rivals.

So is the AOL deal good news? Well, convergence can be seen as a natural process. Recent reports show that the top 100 Web sites attract nearly half of all page views. Net users now spend almost 20 per cent of their online time visiting only the top 10 sites. We could soon reach a stage when the majority of Net users only deal with four or five content providers.

But the consumer also needs to be protected from the growth of huge global brands. Anyone familiar with AOL will be aware that it has often taken draconian action against subscribers who publish what it determines to be offensive material. The signing up of exclusive rights to content also flies heavily in the face of the early values of the Internet.

Finally, the rush to consolidate isn't guaranteed. Yahoo! is a prime example of a site that has vowed to stay platform-independent, despite approaches from US media corporations. Yahoo! claims that merging with one big partner would only weaken its position as a brand.

www.aol.com
www.timewarner.com

C&W snaps up business ISPs

Telco makes new acquisitions to take total European investment to £300 million

Cable & Wireless has acquired eight of Europe's leading independent business ISPs. The move forms part of the telco's transformation from providing consumer services, into a high-quality global platform for the business data market.

Chief executive Graham Wallace said the acquisitions in eight countries including France, Italy and Spain take the company's investment in its European platform to £300 million.

"This is the culmination of a 12-month programme to acquire business ISPs in Europe," he said. Describing the sales revenues of the acquisitions as 'modest' at £80 million, Wallace said he is anticipating growth rates of around 50 per cent as e-commerce takes off.

At present the companies acquired are mostly loss-making or breaking even. The acquisitions give C&W a pan-European network.

"A pan-European operation and global connectivity gives us a major competitive advantage," Wallace added.

The companies acquired in this buying round include: Xpoint in Austria, Online Internet in Belgium, ISDnet in France, UNIDATA in Italy and agri.ch in Switzerland.

www.cwcom.co.uk

:-) Crash test dummy

Virgin Atlantic has prepared for a major airline disaster with a 'fill in the gaps', ready-prepared, Web page. "A Virgin Atlantic aircraft has been involved in an accident: The plane was flying from X(PLACE)X to X(PLACE)X on X(DATE)X. It took off from X(PLACE)X at X(TIME)X local time. The flight number is VS X(NUMBER)X".And to ease your fears, it states "We are already working closely with emergency authorities involved."

www.virgin-atlantic.com

OVERHEARD → "I found it confusing and there were loads of weirdos and geeks asking very rude questions." Sharon, reporter on The Sun talking about online chat

Time line

27 February
The Internet has come a long way from the network that would change the world to an online version of 'ye olde gifte shoppe'. And the people who want to sell you tourist tat online will all be in Atlanta, Georgia, for the 'eGifts' conference on 'marketing, merchandising and distributing gifts on the Internet'.
www.iqpc.com/0220/0220egift.htm

28 February
Everybody knows that XML, the extensible markup language, is the next big thing. Yet nobody seems to use it – it's complicated, harder than HTML and not widely supported. Now anyone with an Oracle database behind their Web site

ORACLE
SOFTWARE POWERS THE INTERNET

can get their hands on Reports 6i, which lets you extract stuff from your database as HTML, PDF or XML. If you want to be ahead of the crowd, it's your best bet.
www.oracle.com

7 March
ICANN – the self-appointed group of the Net's great and good who look after domain names and IP addresses – is having its first meeting outside the United States, just to show that they really are 'global'. They'll be arriving at the Cairo Sheraton Hotel ready to agree their budget, decide what to do about new top level domains (.biz,

ICANN

E-envoy and Oftel opt for competition

Alex Allan's first words to the press focus on Net access for all

Alex Allan, the Government's new e-envoy, has said that the UK is making good progress in becoming the best place in the world to do e-business, but warned that Whitehall is lagging behind.

After contrasting the climates in the UK and Australia, where he was previously the Australian High Commissioner, he had a few words to say about the Net. Allan sees the BT's plan to introduce flat-fee Net calls as major step forward. He said that encouraging competition, rather than regulation from Oftel, was the way to reduce call charges.

But he admitted that it's a controversial issue. "I was getting my ear bent by the ISPs," he told us. "They don't want less regulation. But it's not my role to say what Oftel can and can't do. My aim is to get higher bandwidth services as soon as possible and at the cheapest price."

Away from the issue of costs, Allan said that Whitehall had a lot of work to do to modernise itself. "There are huge cost advantages in the long run and huge opportunities," he said "We must ensure that we meet the objectives of inclusiveness. There are still many people who don't have access to the Net."

He mentioned NHS Direct (our Site of the Month, p32) as an example of a site that fulfils the access criteria. In April, the DfEE will be launching Learn Direct, and the government has also requested tenders for a new portal known as me.gov.uk. Allan's team will advise Whitehall on how to improve its sites.

"There have been times that I've felt like I've been swamped with emails," he said. "But each was read and, in most cases, answered. I'm keen to keep these communication channels open."

On the same day, Oftel announced plans to roll back regulation. The regulator has said it wants to focus on an overall goal of effective competition rather than on detailed regulatory requirements, which principally affects BT as the market's dominant player.

To ensure competition is maintained in different market sectors, the regulator will commission reviews every two years.
www.e-envoy.gov.uk

Send you ideas to Alex Allan at e-envoy@open.gov.uk

Straw's snoop squad

Paranoia still rife about Net crime

Home Secretary, Jack Straw, is to set up a national computer crime unit consisting of crack snoops to combat the threat of Net crime.

Straw has given the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and chief constables £337,000 to draw up a detailed plan for the squad. The unit will include technology experts from the private sector, the Inland Revenue and the police. The snooping skills of MI5 and GCHQ will also be called upon.

In a letter to NCIS, Mr Straw said that the start-up money was "to prepare the ground for the development of a National Computer Crime Unit".

"High-tech and computer crime is a growing area which is open to exploitation by criminals, and it is right that NCIS should house the centre of intelligence and expertise to tackle it," he said.

The announcement comes amid reports that police are investigating attempts by British hackers to blackmail multinational companies.

"No one yet knows the full scale of the problem," an NCIS spokesman said. "Among the crimes we are examining are fraud committed via computers, pedophile and pornographic images, hacking, race-hate sites, criminals using encrypted measures to hide information, software piracy, and people breaking into private and corporate bank accounts."
www.homeoffice.gov.uk
www.netfreedom.org

IN BRIEF

■ The latest figures from Freeserve show 1.68 million subscribers are using its service. Unfortunately the news coincided with a failure of its email server in late January. The company has also poached a key executive from arch-rival AOL. Frank Keeling replaces Mark Danby as Freeserve boss.

■ **The DfEE, the Department of Culture Media and Sport and the DTI have agreed to host days at the World Internet Forum. Written support has been received from Tony Blair, Patricia Hewitt, the e-minister and Alex Allen, the new e-envoy. The WIF is the brainchild of Derek Wyatt MP, and will examine best practice in delivering Government services over the Net.**
www.icp.co.uk/wif

■ Apple has taken the wraps off its new Net strategy, introducing a completely new category of Internet tools called iTools. It includes KidSafe, a way to protect kids on the Net; Mac.com, an email client; HomePage, a Web site building tool and iDisk to store and transfer files on the Net.
www.apple.com

■ **Emap Peterson has won a case against a porn site for alleged cyber-squatting. Peterson, which owns the respectable girl's title Teen Magazine (www.teenmag.com), has now obtained possession of the URL www.teenmagazine.com.**
www.emap.com

■ More than three quarters of schoolchildren think the Internet's more fun than maths and English. According to research from Mori, more than half of 10 to 16 year olds think schools should spend more money on computers than on teachers and books.
www.mori.com

■ **Crunch.co.uk, the dance and alternative music site, has appointed David Phillips, former MD of AOL UK, as its CEO. This follows the appointment of Martin Turner, ex-MD of CompuServe, to rival site Peoplesound.**
www.crunch.co.uk

■ The Internet Watch Foundation, the self-regulation body funded by ISPs, has extended its role following meetings with the Home Office. As well as running a hotline for dealing with porn, its activities will cover racist content.
www.iwf.org.uk

■ **Since flotation in December, 365 Corp has been busy launching new services to add to its 365-branded sites. 365Television will make content for digital television. The company has also bought e-Merchants, the operator of US site RugbyRugby.com.**
www.365corp.com

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Point of technology:
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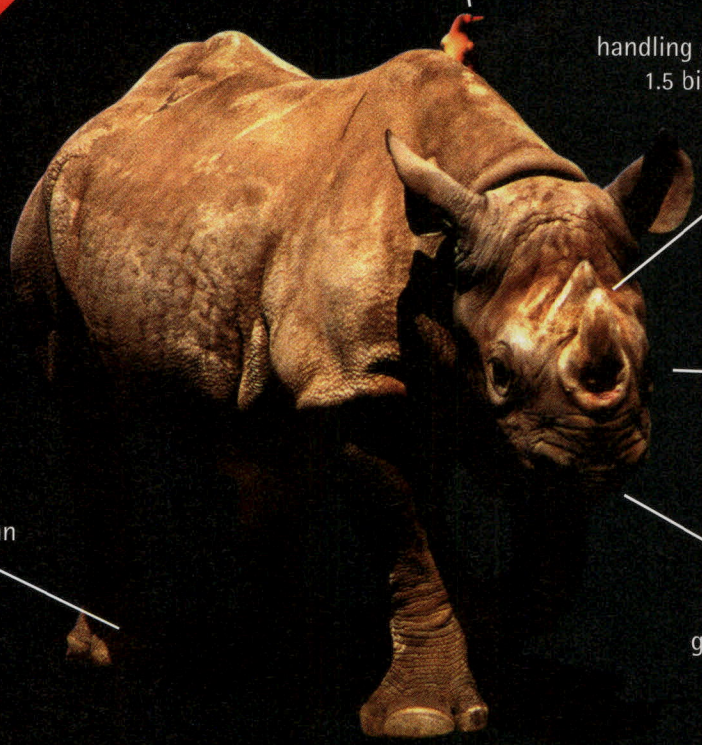

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OVERHEARD → "Time to switch on my laptop - or 'boot up', as the experts say." Sharon from The Sun. (yet again!)

Time line

anyone?) and generally decide the future of the Net. Should be fun – at least on the Webcast.
www.icann.org

Mid-March

Even though Microsoft give Outlook Express away, millions of Net users prefer Eudora for managing their email.

EUDORA

Even Net goddess Esther Dyson uses it. So get your version of Eudora 4.3 now from the Qualcomm Web site. You can have 'sponsored', with built-in ads, 'lite' with fewer ads and fewer functions, or 'paid' with no ads and lots of cool features.
www.eudora.com

4 March

A first class return ticket to Tokyo will cost you, but if you really want a PlayStation2 – the DVD-based 128 bit successor to the PlayStation – you'll find a way. The games machine is available from today in Japan,

Interactive TV services to build on early success

Sky Digital's Open services leads the way with good results

Open, the interactive TV service from Sky Digital, has confounded its critics by announcing better than expected subscriber figures since its launch in October.

Broadcast tracking research from Millard Brown reveals that 45 per cent of all households with digital satellite TV have gone into Open at least once a week. The average length of each visit to the service is 15 minutes.

In the pre-Christmas period, sales taken over the Open service were exceeding £1 million a week.

"E-commerce is about more than just hit rates and click-throughs – it's about real sales," said James Ackerman, CEO at the company. "Open has proved in a short period of time that its service is capable of generating real sales."

Open had been slammed by the critics for signing up online shops – such as Argos, Next and Yalplay, on an exclusive basis. For example, there is only allowed to be one CD retailer and one clothing site on the service at any given time. The service is also proprietary and gives no access to the Web.

Web pages can be costly to produce for the Open platform, since existing site design would need complete re-engineering. Open does allow email use, though, and the company states that 200,000 people have signed up to use it.

In a separate move, cable operator NTL has announced that it has selected the Microsoft TV software platform to deliver its interactive television services. The service will let viewers play along with game shows, get sports statistics and access video on demand. This services will run alongside provision of Net access and email.

Rival ONdigital is one of the least developed. It offers no interactive services at the moment, and only provides a basic teletext service.

A company spokesman told us that an email service, known as ONmail, will be launched in the next few months. The company is also committed to offering Net access, although subscribers will have to wait over a year for this to launch.
www.open-here.co.uk
www.ntl.com
www.ondigital.co.uk

● Open has confounded its critics with its highly respectable subscriber figures

UK does the business

Britain is winning the European e-commerce race

The UK is leading the rest of Europe in e-commerce according to a survey of business leaders across the continent.

According to UPS Europe Business Monitor, 55 per cent of British business executives said their company used the Net for e-commerce, well-above the European average.

The closest contenders to the UK were Belgium and Spain with 38 per cent. In Italy, which has one of the lowest Net usage rates in Europe, 78 per cent said they didn't use e-commerce.

Daily newspapers are still the primary source of business information, but a third predicted that in one to two years the Net will replace this.

UK business leaders also got the most email, averaging 29 a day. But most of them still prefer to send confidential information by courier rather than electronically.
www.ebm.ups.com

:-) Revenge of the geeks

The craze for locking oneself away and seeing if you can survive with just the Net has spread to the UK. In the US, 25 year old Mitch Maddox, who changed his name to DotComGuy, went into isolation. Never afraid to rip off a good story, reporters from GMTV and *The Sun* have tried similar experiments. But while DotComGuy is locking himself away for a whole year, the 'daring' British reporters are living in isolation for (a slightly less impressive) one week.
www.dotcomguy.com
www.gmtvweblife.co.uk
www.the-sun.co.uk

BOOKMARKS OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

It's magician...

Paul Daniels

Best known for his magic and quiz shows, Paul was a regular on our TV screens in the '80s. His catchphrase "You'll like it, not a lot" became embedded on the collective minds of a nation. These days, he still performs magic in theatres up and down the land and lives with his on-stage assistant, the beautiful Debbie McGee.

Do you use the Internet at home?
I've been online for two years. I tried CompuServe, but switched to MSN because it's so much easier. Debbie uses it, but only for email.

What do you like about it?
If I have anything I want to know or research, the Internet is the first point of call.

What do you dislike?
I dislike sites with lots of graphics, moving icons and all that jazz. I want to get to the 'meat' quickly, and not wait for some designer stuff to download.

Do you look at Web sites about magic?
I don't like sites that give secrets away because someone's accidentally come across them or done a wide search on the word magic. Magic is a theatrical art – it should be kept as secret as possible in order for people to enjoy it.

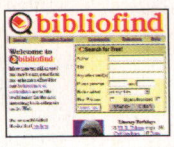
SO WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE WEB SITES?

The Sharper Image
www.shaperimage.com
I love gadgets, so I usually visit this site to see what's new.

QXL
www.qxl.com
I use QXL, the auction site, to see what airline flight deals are out there. You can pick up some amazing bargains.

Google
www.google.com
This search engine is quick, simple and really clever.

Google



Bibilofind
www.bibliofind.com
I love books, so I constantly look at this online bookstore. It's particularly good for used and rare books.

For more about Paul Daniels visit
www.pauldaniels.co.uk

OVERHEARD → "The Internet might be crowded right now, or there could be a problem with a phone line somewhere." Budget airline Go explains why its Web site doesn't work

EssentialViewing

The Web is huge and phone calls are expensive. So save time and money and only visit this month's essential sites

SERVICES

IN THE SMALL PRINT

If you need business cards and comp slips for your small business, you need to fork out a small fortune for several thousand of them, right? Wrong. Data Layout lets you order as few as 250 business cards for only £40. That price includes full colour printing on one side. You design the card yourself, send Data Layout the file, and it'll print them for you. The portfolio includes ID cards, posters, mouse mats, T-shirts, menus, CD covers and invitations. You can pay online, and delivery takes just 24 hours. Well worth bookmarking, even if it's just for future reference.

www.datalayout.co.uk

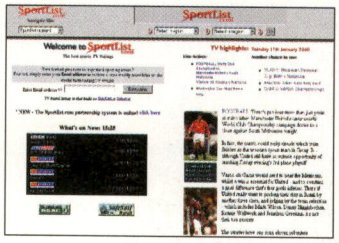
SPORT

Fancy splicing a main brace and finding out about keelhauling, maximum revolutions and regatta racing? Maritime Britain 2000 is a new Web site that's supported by the Millennium Festival fund. It wants you to take part in, or at least watch, the various nautical activities that are taking place across the country this year.

www.maritimebritain2000.com

Kickon claims to be the ultimate equestrian Web site, whether you're a professional rider, an amateur, or just a fascinated spectator. As with most new portals, Kickon is also an ISP. The site's worth visiting if you're interested in all things equestrian. You can chat with others, read the features, play games and buy lots of gear.

www.kickon.com



But if you're someone who only watches sport on the telly, SportList is hoping to be the only site you'll ever visit! It's the UK's first sports-related TV guide to the 600 programmes that are broadcast every week.

www.sportlist.com

ENTERTAINMENT

Dig-music.com is the latest site from enoughMusic. It caters for all musical tastes, from alternative to country and classical to jazz. You can listen to lesser-known artists and rate them before deciding whether you want to buy.

www.dig-music.com

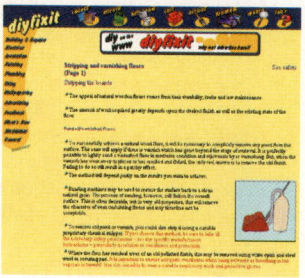
Mudhut, the new online music community site, focuses on Acid Jazz from the likes of The Beta Band, Shack, Guided by Voices and Les Rythmes Digitales. You'll find the usual mix of chat, news, features, an online mag and a shop, but it's a good site that seems to know its market.

www.mudhut.co.uk

HOME IMPROVEMENT

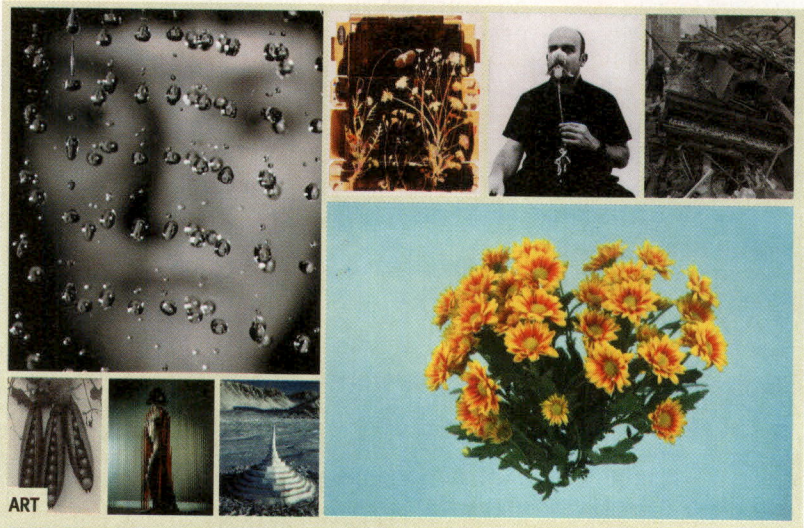
If you're thinking about taking spring cleaning a step further and repainting *that* room or fixing your squeaky floorboards, a new site called e-commend could be just the tool you need. It hopes to match homeowners with contractors, and vice versa.

www.e-commend.co.uk



One builder has been busy ensuring that if you can't afford to pay someone else, you can do it yourself. Stephen Worral's site features a lifetime's tips on everything from unblocking your lavatory to sanding the floor of your bedroom.

www.diyfixit.co.uk



ART

BUT IS IT ART?

Modern art. It's all a bit rubbish, isn't it? Well, no, not really. And a trip to Eyestorm will prove it. This new, Flashed up site revolves around a pool of work from the highest calibre of modern and contemporary artists. You name 'em, they're here – Hirst, Hockney, Rousse, Warhol. You can even buy some of the artists' work – £1,000 will get you an original Hirst for your living room. It's more than your average online gallery, and a good shopping site for people with more cash in their wallets than most of us have in our savings accounts.

www.eyestorm.com

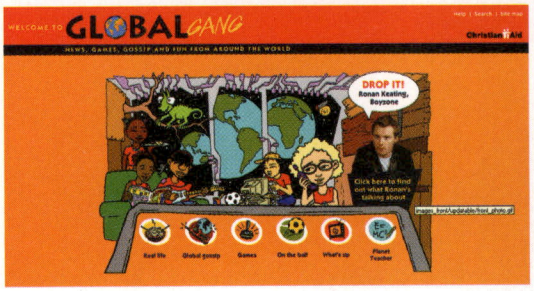
OVERHEARD ⋯› "Clothes are tough to sell online, you can't feel them or try them on – Boo.com has changed this." Boo's Kaja Leaner overestimates the Net's power

FOOD

GONE WITH THE TINNED

Remember that bloke who found a mouse in a tin of baked beans? It probably made you a bit nervous about canned food. Well, now you can make sure you're well informed thanks to the Canned Food Information Centre Web site. The site has news, tips on healthy eating, diary dates for the canned world, and recipes that help you get the most from your tinned vegetables. You can also follow the exciting adventures of Captain Casperi Can and Captain Candi Tinn in the education area. This might sound a bit corny, but at least there's no canned laughter...

www.cannedfood.co.uk



EDUCATION

The hottest trend in site launches seems to be education. We've reviewed Homework Solver (www.homeworksolver.com) on page 81, but other sites are giving it a run for its money.

First up is a Christian Aid (www.christian-aid.org.uk) site called Global Gang. It aims to present world issues from a kids' point of view. You'll find games that involve getting water from a tap without treading on landmines, and helping children escape from an Indian carpet factory.

www.globalgang.org.uk

RM, the leading online education specialist (www.rm.com), has a new site that lets schoolchildren learn about government by taking part in an online Act of Parliament. It follows mock anti-smoking legislation from the White Paper stage, through its readings and committees, and until it's ratified as 'law'.

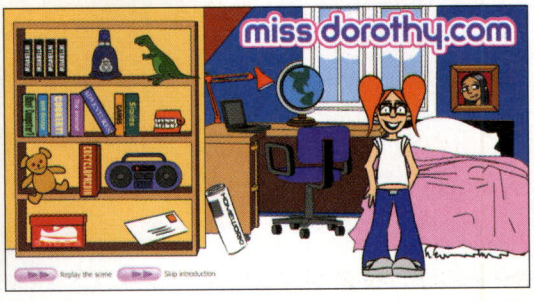
www.explore.parliament.uk

Ahead of its full launch later this year, the British Museum has launched a site about ancient Egypt. As you'd expect, there's plenty of quality information on mummies, gods, goddesses, pyramids and hieroglyphics.

www.ancientegypt.co.uk

Missdorothy.com (www.edex.net) is, according to her creators, 'the voice for cyber children'. The site has some excellent animation, games, music, chat and plenty of quality content.

www.missdorothy.com



CLASSIFIEDS

The latest online classifieds site is from an established brand, AutoTrader (www.autotrader.co.uk). AdTrader has over 250,000 things for sale, from cats and dogs to caravans and disco balls.

www.adtrader.co.uk

If you've still got the matching vest and socks combo that Auntie gave you for Christmas, try selling it on Loot's Web site.

www.loot.com

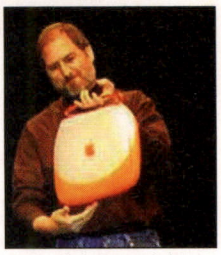
AND FINALLY

The Millennium Mapping Company's site details the project to map every inch of the UK using aerial photography and the results are impressive. You can get a shot of your own neck of the woods for just £178.50, complete with a Domesday Book entry.

www.millennium-map.com

TECHUPDATE

ALL THE LATEST INTERNET TECHNOLOGY NEWS



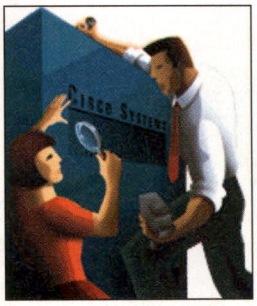
● Apple's Steve Jobs

■ Steve Jobs is the new CEO at Apple, the company he co-founded in 1976. The appointment, announced at the Macworld show in San Francisco, will please Apple's shareholders. The company witnessed a rise in fortunes during Jobs' caretaker period in the position, which saw the successful launches of the iMac and iBook. Apple also used the Macworld show to unveil Mac OS X and its much anticipated iTools Internet strategy.

www.apple.com

■ Networking giant Cisco Systems has recalled thousands of the switches that are used to form the backbone of parts of the Net and corporate intranets. The company found that the faulty components were liable to cause short-outs. Cisco admits that a number of boards have already failed, resulting in puffs of smoke and system shutdowns.

www.cisco.com



● Cisco's switches have set the Web alight... literally

■ Intel Online Services has built a major server farm in the Thames Valley to meet the growing need for Internet hosting in the UK. The facility will hold up to 10,000 servers and employ around 170 staff at a cost of over £91 million.

www.seeda.co.uk

■ Former Gateway executive Bill McEwen has bought the rights to Amiga, the computer that changed the face of computing in the '80s.

www.amiga.com

● The Amiga brand has been sold for an estimated £3 million

■ France Telecom is building a 800Mbps, fibre-optic Internet network, providing seven access points around Paris, Rennes, Grenoble, Toulouse, and Sophia-Antipolis. The network will start testing multimedia applications immediately.

www.francetelecom.fr

■ The Broadband Digital Group says its announcement to produce a free DSL service to US consumers on April Fools' Day is no prank. Users in the US can already register for the free high-speed service which starts on the unfortunate date of 1 April 2000.

www.freedsl.com

■ Computer Associates has alerted browsers to two new viruses. The first, with the catchy name of Win32/H4.1852, is most likely to appear if you're using a combination of IE, the Windows scripting host, and low security settings in your browser. The virus generates a debug script and batch files that can infect your system when executed. The second virus strain, Plage2000, threatens your email, arriving as an enticing .exe mail.

www.cai.com/virusinfo

Have you clicked yet?

So called 'free' Internet service providers give you free access to the net – but you are charged for every single Internet call you make. Whereas with ClaraNET, a monthly subscription of just £5.99 gives you 12 FREE HOURS of evening and weekend Internet call time.

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- 24 hr support line at local rates
- 50MB webspace

OVERHEARD→ "Search for "aol sucks" on the Internet, and you'll find more than 4,000 Web pages." The Guardian

Time line

months before we see them in Europe.
www.playstation.com

Late March

Sorry to be vague, but US courts are like that. Sometime around now we'll hear what US District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson proposes to do to Microsoft if, as expected, it is found guilty of abusing its monopoly power. Not that anything will happen straight away – there will be at least two years of appeals before it's all settled.

www.microsoft.com/freedomtoinnovate

24 March

The future comes a little nearer today with the announcement of who has won in the auction for five Third Generation Mobile Telephone licenses – permission to run the sort of fast wireless network your PDA has been crying out for. The licenses will cost millions, but should net their owners a lot more. It might not be QXL, but it's really important.
www.spectrum auctions.gov.uk

The rise and rise of Linux

The use of Linux, the open source operating system, is on the increase among cash-starved governments in Asia and high-end workstation operators.

News reaches us from Beijing, that China's government is to use the OS across all its ministries and government departments. Contrary to some reports, it did not specificially say that there was a government ban on using Microsoft Windows 2000.

Linux is regarded as a good choice for China, both for local control of the OS and for security reasons. It's also cheap compared to Windows and is sometimes even free.

It is estimated that fewer than 25,000 people in China are familiar with Windows source code, whereas developers all throughout China can have access to Linux's open code to develop their own versions and applications.

In a separate announcement, IBM has said it will "Linux-enable" all of its hardware and will port applications and middleware to Linux as well.

"The next generation of e-business will see customers increasingly demand open standards for interoperability across disparate platforms," said Samuel Palmisano, IBM senior vice president. "Linux will play a pivotal role in this."

Critics say that IBM is banking Linux to help renew interest in and purchase of its servers, which have faced stiff competition in recent years, particularly from Sun Microsystems' server line.

To find out more, see our feature about Linux on page 58.
www.ibm.co.uk
www.linux.com
www.chinese-embassy.org.uk

US gets free DSL

The Broadband Digital Group, based in California, is offering its customers high speed broadband access to the Net for free. BT says it will charge £49.99 a month for digital subscriber line (DSL) when it's rolled-out in the UK.

The service, known as FreeDSL, will be funded by advertising. A small navigational bar displays adverts on a user's desktop while they are online.

The navigational bar can not be closed and must remain visible on the desktop as long as the user is online.

While it's unclear whether this model will ever make it to UK shores, the service is proving very popular. 100,000 customers have signed up within the first week. The service goes live in April.
www.freedsl.com
www.bt.com

BT goes WAP

BT Cellnet, Britain's second largest mobile operator, has launched its first generation of Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) phones, which will provide more sophisticated data from the Internet on cellphones.

Earlier this month, Vodafone unveiled its own WAP platform after signing up an impressive array of partners including the BBC. Orange, owned by Germany's Mannesmann, set up its first generation of WAP phones late last year, but has so far been crippled by a shortage of handsets.

To coincide with the release of phones with WAP capabilities, Excite UK and Wcities.com have launched dedicated WAP sites.
www.btcellnet.co.uk
www.excite.co.uk/wap
www.wcities.com

ISP ROUND-UP

■ **Worrying indications this month of the foreign ISP market muscling in on UK territory. The X-Stream Network, the UK's first free and third largest ISP has lost 10 per cent of its share capital to France's first free and second largest ISP, Liberty Surf, in a deal worth around $5 million.**
www.x-stream.com

■ In a $2.9 billion stock deal, US telco Nextlink Communications has acquired Internet access provider Concentric Network (www.concentric.com). This is just the latest in a string of ISP buyouts by major telcos looking to expand beyond voice services into the lucrative high-speed Internet service market.
www.nextlink.net

■ **Telewest has chosen Harmonic's (www.harmonicinc.com) open-standards broadband delivery system for its upcoming UK trials of video-on-demand (VoD). Scheduled for release in the early this year, the initial service offering to 300,000 homes will be the world's largest standards-based VoD rollout.**
www.telewest.co.uk

■ BT, Cable & Wireless and UUNet are the latest ISPs to sign up to SpeechMail, the email by phone service developed by speech tech specialist Vocalis. The service lets email subscribers access messages using a phone and spoken commands. Freeserve was the first ISP to adopt the service. The Royal Institute for the Blind is currently conducting a Speechmail pilot.

■ **Demon Internet claims a total of 3,500 customers responded to its offer of ADSL trials, far exceeding the initial offer of 500 places. The trials form part of BT's current series of ADSL trials in 13 locations across the UK.**
www.demon.net

■ PSINet directors have approved a two-for-one split of its common stock in the form of a stock dividend. This follows analyst estimates that the e-commerce services specialist would lose $1.54 a share in the fourth quarter of 1999, compared with a loss of $1.02 in the same period last year.
www.psi.net

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PLUS ALL THIS!
Miva shopping cart, installed, licensed & ready to run. This inexpensive business soltuions includes integrated secure server access, web-based admin interface, unlimited products and categories, customisable look and feel, integration to existing site, ease of use, online help. Be up and running today
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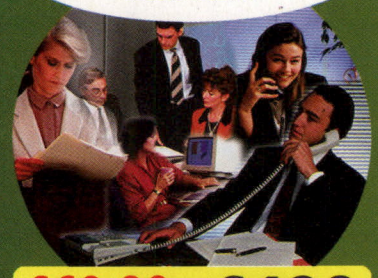
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info@webfusion.co.uk
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Hot Downloads

ON THE CD

After trawling sites all over the world, **Greg Sloman** brings you the products worth downloading. Plus the top 10 sites for Dreamweaver extensions

HOTLIST

Top 10 Dreamweaver Extensions

MACROMEDIA
www.macromedia.com
Download extensions to add commands, objects and JavaScript behaviours to your tool palettes and menus.

SCOTT'S DREAMWEAVER TOOLS
www.chrisandscott.com/Dreamweaver
You'll find objects, commands and behaviours on this site, as well as a useful calendar generator.

CONVERSA
www.conversa.com
Add voice to your Web content without affecting your site.

IBM
www-4.ibm.com/software/net.media
Stitch images into a panorama, add special effects to your site and synchronize images or charts with audio clips.

ALLAIRE
www.allaire.com
Extend Dreamweaver to build your own dynamic pages.

MASSIMO'S CORNER OF THE WEB
www.massimocorner.com
A good range of Dreamweaver extensions, tips and links.

DREAMWEAVER BIBLE
www.idest.com/dreamweaver
Pick up Dreamweaver objects, behaviours, techniques and information, all designed to assist your site building.

DREAMWEAVER DEPOT
http://people.netscape.com/andreww/dreamweaver
Custom-built extensions that let you add new features.

YAROMAT
www.yaromat.com
Easy to use custom Dreamweaver objects and behaviours.

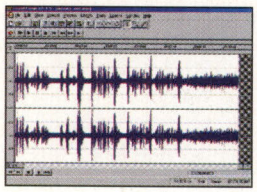
YAVA
www.hava.com
Helpful tips from a member of the Dreamweaver team.

GIFMATION

The new Mac version of GIFmation comes with QuickTime 4 effects, improved optimisation, and numerous speed improvements so you can create faster, smaller GIFs. It has a browser compatibility utility that warns you when your animation settings won't work in certain browsers, as well as a range of advanced features for creating GIF animations.
Price *$49.95 (Around £30)*
Platforms *Win9x/Mac*
Download size *1.09Mb (Win), 2.58Mb (Mac)*
www.boxtopsoft.com

SOUND FORGE XP

Do you want to make a little noise on the Internet or give your multimedia projects some extra kick? This feature-rich audio editor

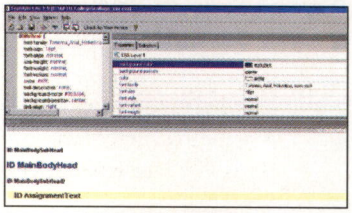


from Sonic Foundry has all the tools you'll need for creating and editing sound clips and music for the Net. You get a good set of filters, processors and effects to work with, plus support for MP3, RealAudio, Windows Media and ACID loops.
Price *$49.95 (Around £30)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *6.73Mb*
www.sonicfoundry.com

COPERNIC 2000

Are you spending too much time searching the Web? Copernic can do the job for you by using the best search engines simultaneously. It ranks your search results by relevance, along with summaries that it stores and organises on your hard disk. It lets you download search results onto your PC for offline browsing any time, reducing your phone bills.
Price *Free*
Platforms *Win9x/NT/Mac*
Download size *2.32Mb*
www.copernic.com

TOPSTYLE



TopStyle is a style sheet editor that could save you lots of time. By creating one style sheet for things like font styles and colours, you can easily make sweeping changes to your Web pages. Unfortunately, not every browser fully supports style sheets, so TopStyle creates cross-browser style sheets and alerts you of problems as you work.
Price *$49.95 (Around £30)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *1.52Mb*
www.bradsoft.com/topstyle

URLMENU

Urlmenu is a bookmark utility that works with Netscape and IE. It gives you a popup menu on your

IMAGE FORGE

This graphics editor has everything you need to create quality artwork, from digital paintings and photo editing to Web art and animations. Image Forge has some excellent tools for natural media, oil paint, watercolours and 3D text. There's also a built-in HTML editor and GIF animator. You can package your work into a standalone image library program, complete with viewer, editor, slide show utility and .wav or .mp3 audio player.
Price *$28.95 (Around £17.50)*
Platform *Win9x/NT*
Download size *5.41Mb*
www.cursorarts.com

OVERHEARD → "By 2004 the UK drinks market will be worth £12.9 billion. We estimate around £600 million of this will be sold online." Spokesman for ebooze.co.uk

MUSICMATCH JUKEBOX

MusicMatch Jukebox is a combined CD player and digital music encoder, player and digital music library. It lets you digitally record and encode MP3 and Windows Media tracks from CDs in a single step, creating CD-quality audio files. You can record all your favourite songs onto your hard drive, creating a database for playing customised song lists. It also lets you record from other sources, such as albums and cassettes, and add songs to your database. You can also download singles, or stream music files, from the Net.

Price *$29.99 (Around £18)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *4.72Mb*
www.musicmatch.com

taskbar for instant access to your favourite sites. The link-checking wizard can test all of your Bookmarks and Favourites and tell you which ones are dead or unavailable. You'll find

urlmenu particularly useful if you use a lot of different dial-up networking sessions on your machine.

Price *$15.00 (Around £9)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *260k*
www.elphin.com/products/urlmenu

INBOX SPECIALIST

InboxSpecialist is a System Tray utility that checks your email in the background while you work. It accesses your email server at specific intervals and checks for new mail, giving you the option of deleting it instead of downloading it. You can set the program to display part of a text message or listen to only the first few seconds of an MP3 file, which will save you money.

Price *Free*
Platforms *Win9X/NT*
Download size *836k*
www.gutmannsoft.com

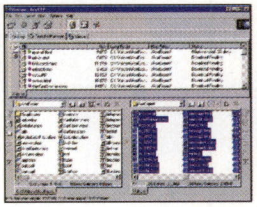
QUICKSPOT

This handy utility compares two text files and tells you the differences it finds between them. It reports the differences on a line by line basis and highlights lines that are not in synch. QuickSpot can compare HTML files, text formatted files and spreadsheets. A scanning feature lets you narrow down the comparison, skip lines, or stop the utility when it finds certain characters that you can specify.

Price *$29 (Around £17.50)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *671k*
www.famtech.ca

ACE FTP

This is a neat FTP program that lets you transfer files from your PC to an Internet server. AceFTP can connect to any type of server and



several servers at the same time. The file viewer lets you view or listen to files before you upload them. You can also preview any type of file, such as a images, Java Applets, ActiveX controls and sound files, without even leaving the program.

Price *$29.95 (around £18)*
Platforms *Win9x/NT*
Download size *856k*
**www.visicommedia.com*

SMILEY GUIDE TO INTERNET USERS

G-WHIZZ.NET

What does your choice of ISP say about you? This month, after a huge ad promotion on TV, it's G-WHIZZ, the free ISP from Granada

AGE: 30 to 50 year olds.
APPEARANCE: Leggings or saggy jeans, plus a T-shirt supporting the latest soap opera campaign – popular examples include Free Deidre Rashid, Sinbad is innocent and Hands off The Woolpack .
HANGOUTS: The lounge and the toilet (between ad breaks).
KNOWN ASSOCIATES: Few. Their children and anyone who comes round to visit.
LIKES: Richard and Judy, soaps (including *Brookside*, *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale* and *Home and Away*) and shouting at the TV during *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?*.
HATES: The phone ringing during Cori, the BBC, losing the TV guide or remote control.
PHILOSOPHY: Nice to see you, to see you nice – as long as you've brought some pear drops and you don't speak while the TV's on.
IN OTHER WORDS: Couch-laying, tea-drinking, square-eyed TV addict who dreams of going to Granada Studios in Manchester.
LATEST FAD: Digital TV and online shopping on Open – Sky's interactive TV platform.
MOST LIKELY TO SAY: "Is that your final answer? Are you sure? You don't want to change your mind? It's an awful lot of money to throw away."
LEAST LIKELY TO SAY: "I just love the BBC."
MORE FROM: www.g-whizz.net

CASIO CASSIOPEIA E-105

PRICE £499.99
CONTACT Casio UK
TEL (020) 8450 9131
www.casio.co.uk

Weighing in at 255g, the Cassiopeia E-105 is a more muscular version of Casio's old green-screen E-15 palmtop. It now boasts full-colour multimedia, a suite of communications tools, the latest version of Windows CE, and a souped up 131MHz MIPS NEC processor – all wrapped up in a sleek, silvery shell.

To help the E-105 juggle multimedia apps, Casio has included 32Mb RAM and 16Mb ROM as standard, coupled with a 240x320 pixel, TFT liquid crystal, 65,536 colour touch screen with backlight.

Bundled multimedia applications include Casio's own MP3 player, MS Audio player, Mobile Video player, Video Convertor (for transferring QuickTime, AVI, and MPEG1 formats), a trial version of Music Match JukeBox, Image Viewer, and Palm Golf. Standard palmtop organiser software comes in the shape of Pocket Outlook, Note Taker, Voice Recorder, and a handy apps launcher. Removable media for all your music and video files is courtesy of a Type II CompactFlash Card slot.

Using the supplied TDK GlobalPulse Soft GSM Modem, irDA port and a GSM phone, you can also connect to any ISP with POP3 support and use the Cassiopeia to browse, email and fax.

Throw in the cradle, PC sync software, and Lithium-Ion long-life battery, and you'll be happy at your desk or out and about. What are you waiting for?

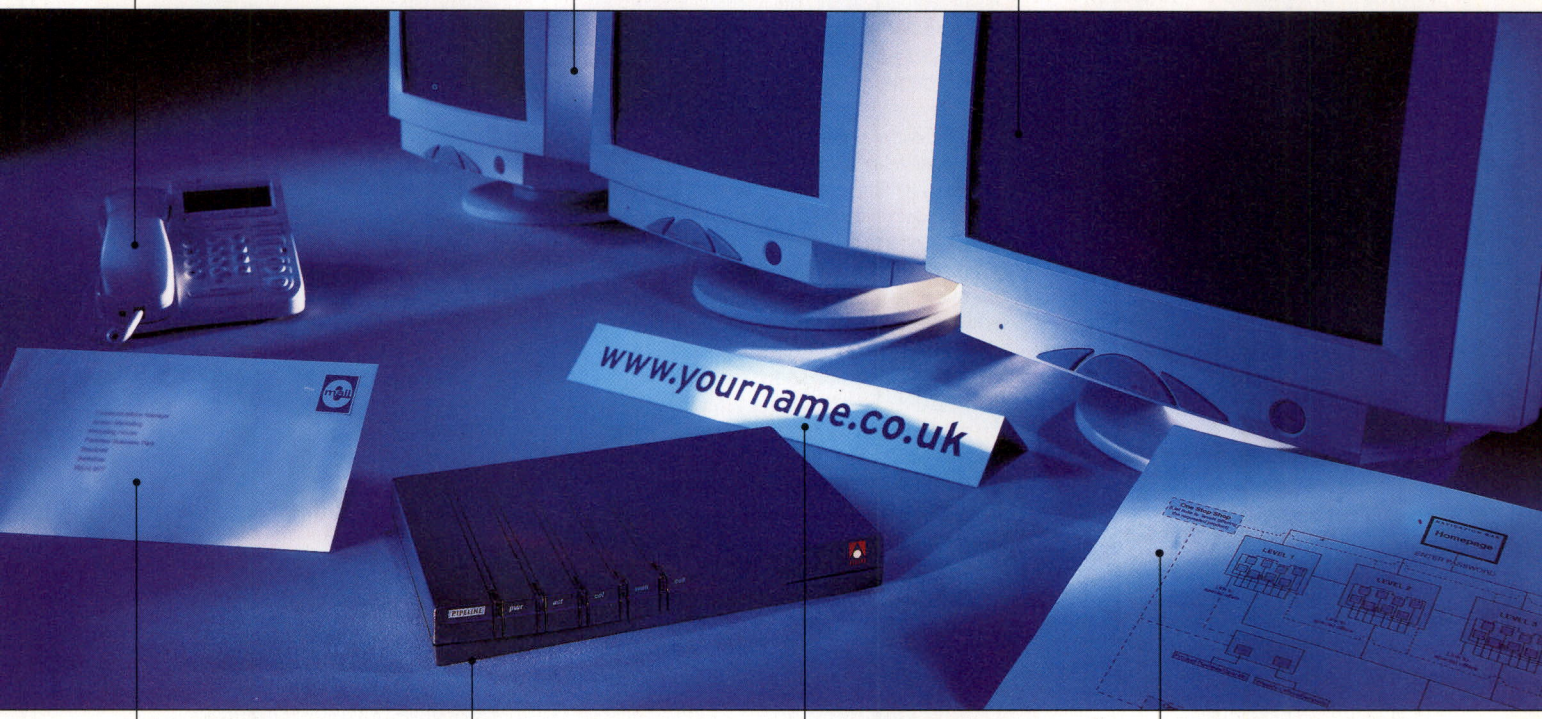
THE INCLUSIVE BUSINESS PACKAGE

INCLUSIVE
Technical Support
7 days a week - your business will always have help to hand. Our dedicated technical support team is there to help.

INCLUSIVE
Lan connectivity
A fast, 128k digital dial-on-demand service provides full, simultaneous Internet access for staff. Being dial-on-demand, you only pay when you are using the service- a local rate call*

* A 64k connection is a local rate call. 128k connections are two 0845 local calls bonded together.

INCLUSIVE
25Mb of Web space
25Mb of Web space within your domain (http://www.yourcompany.co.uk) is allocated for your business use (subject to the operating terms and conditions on our Web Site).



INCLUSIVE
Unlimited e-mail addresses
Every employee in your company will have their own e-mail address.

INCLUSIVE
Pre-configured router & firewall
Routers are configured to each individual customer's requirements. In addition, an integrated firewall protects your network from intruders.

INCLUSIVE
Domain name registration
Unique domain name to identify your company (yourcompany.co.uk).

WEB DESIGN
Option
To complete your Business Package, a bespoke design service is available to promote your company, product and services on the Web.

£550
£646.25 INC VAT

The Enterprise Business Package offers everything to get you onto the Web, including hardware, a unique domain name (yourcompany.co.uk - subject to availability) and infinite e-mail addresses.

Connecting to the Internet via Enterprise could not be more straightforward. We take care of the technical issues to ensure your Internet LAN service is on-line as seamlessly and as quickly as possible. To find out how you can benefit from the Enterprise Business Package contact our sales staff on our dedicated telephone sales line or by e-mail at sales@enterprise.net.

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Sales Enquiries
http://www.enterprise.net
E-mail
sales@enterprise.net

OVERHEARD → By 2003 there will be an estimated 535 million digital mobile phone users in Europe." Research from wcities (www.wcities.com)

BUG OF THE MONTH

Where the worst examples of sloppy programming, poor security awareness and plain bad sense, are dragged kicking and screaming into the light by *Internet Magazine*'s resident Bug Monitor, Bill Thompson

You can now store your complete CD collection (**http://my.mp3.com**), your diary (**http://calendar.yahoo.com**) and your entire hard disk (**www.idisk.com**) online. More and more people are taking advantage of these services by placing their personal information on other people's Web servers. But you must be sure that these services can guarantee the security of your data on the Web. You don't want the whole world knowing about your Hawkwind CDs, after all.

Unfortunately, one of the most popular services on the Web is open to attack because of an unexpected interaction between its various components.

Mail2Web (**www.mail2web.com**) is an incredibly useful and easy to use service that can read and send email from almost any POP3 account, so you can log on to your work email from home, or vice versa. There's no registration and no fee – you just type in your username and password and it'll try to fetch your email. It even knows the names of the POP servers for most ISPs, so you don't even have to worry about configuration issues.

The service works, and if the privacy policy is to be believed, it's secure. But it's not quite secure enough.

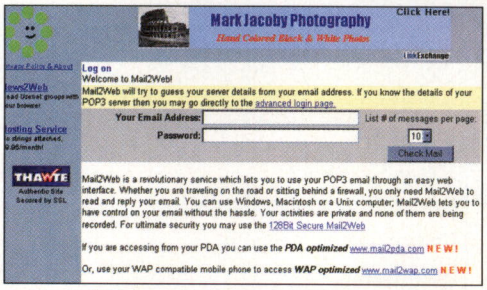
When you read your email via Mail2Web, your messages are retrieved from the POP server, reformatted as a Web page and sent over the Net. In order to deliver them, the Mail2Web server generates a unique URL for each message page.

The fun starts if there's a URL in the message you're reading, and if you click on it from inside the Mail2Web page. When your Web browser goes to get this new page it presents the address it's just come from (called the referrer log) to the new Web server. This address is all someone needs to get access to your email.

A Web site administrator at Dutch ISP Pine Internet (**www.pine.nl**) discovered the bug when he noticed a peculiar URL in his site's referrer logs. He copied the URL into the address bar of his browser and discovered he was in someone else's email account.

This is a relatively obscure problem. Most Web administrators don't trawl their logs for Mail2Web URLs, and the URL is only valid for a short time while someone's reading their mail – Mail2Web doesn't cache pages. You can fix it easily by getting the Mail2Web server to refuse referrer details.

But this bug shows that the level of online security is never guaranteed. Nobody can say that a bug in their software will not make your details available to the whole world. You need to remain cautious about what you put on other people's computers.



● **The Mail2Web service has a bug in opening Web pages**

DESIGN ROUND-UP

■ **Channel 4 is extending its online portfolio by launching standalone sites that deal with homework, gay lifestyle, entertainment, film and horse racing. The first of these sites to be launched, Homework High (www.homeworkhigh.co.uk), was designed by Cimex and went live at the end of January. The gay lifestyle site, Out4Life (www.out4life.com), has also gone live and was designed by Oyster (which beat AKQA on delivery dates). Oyster will also be producing the racing site for Channel 4.**

www.cimexmedia.co.uk
www.oyster.co.uk

■ Reading Room has been appointed to build a new Web site for the newly merged Glaxo SmithKline. The London-based consultancy was chosen ahead of many bigger rivals for the high quality of its work. One of the UK's top law firms, CMS Cameron McKenna, has migrated its hosting and Web master services to the rapidly expanding agency.

www.readingroom.net

■ **Agency.com has announced that it will float on the Nasdaq stock market. The company has issued just under six million shares at $26 (around £16.25) each. This is above the expected $22 price and makes the company worth almost £100 million.**

www.agency.com/investors

■ Another recently announced flotation, the 365 Corporation, has won the contract to build the official Brit Awards Web site for the (**www.brits.co.uk**) second year running. The music365 team has designed the site.

www.music365.co.uk

THE WILD, WILD WEB

■ There have been some mad products on the Web over the years, from the Poop Moose (**www.poopmoose.com**) to Sony's robot dog (**www.world.sony.com/aibo**). But now we've found something for your mouse – that poor, neglected creature that helps you use your computer every day. The big question is, what do you do with yours at night? Well, now you can give it a home with Ben Gammon's Mouse House. It's described as a 'night-time shelter for millions of homeless computer mice'. It won't cost you anything if you print the PDF document from the site and get to work with your scissors and sticky back plastic.

www.mouse-house.co.uk

■ **You might have seen the video clip of a bloke with computer rage that throws his PC around the office. Well here's a site that takes that idea and develops it into the Illustrated Guide to Breaking Your Computer. This includes destroying your keyboard with a power drill and taking a hacksaw to your hard disk. We don't recommend this activity, but it's worth a look – feel the stress being released from your body as the computer gets it.**

http://members.aol.com/spoons1000/break/index.html

■ Continuing the theme of destroying technology, the simple mission statement of the Phonebashing site is to 'Kill mobile phones!'. It details the attempts that the site's manic owners have made in stealing and then trashing people's mobile phones. Too mad to be real, surely?

www.phonebashing.com

PHONEBASHING

■ **And now for something completely different. In the mysteries and alternative archaeology corner of The Wild, Wild Web is the Daily Grail. The site claims there was a lost civilisation around 10,500 years ago. The people of this great race lived in Antarctica (which wasn't covered in ice at the time), according to the site, and a catastrophe gave rise to the legends of Atlantis, the biblical flood of Noah and a whole range of astronomy, sailing skills and lost technology. They even helped to build the pyramids in Egypt and South America, the lost city of Ankor Wat and plenty more besides. This isn't as mad as it sounds, because the evidence is compelling stuff.**

www.dailygrail.com

■ Finally, if you need to tell someone about your sins and you don't have time to get to church, try out The Confessor from London-based Premier Christian radio. You just type in your transgression and the Net helps you make your peace with God. The Roman Catholic Church has condemned the idea, saying "This is not what Catholics would understand as confession". Not sure anyone would to be honest.

www.theconfessor.co.uk

www.hp.com/go/printers

Only reality looks more real.

Need a towel? You could be forgiven for wanting one.
That's because this was printed using the most advanced inkjet printing process available. Hewlett-Packard's revolutionary PhotoREt precision technology.

Not only can it blend up to 29 drops of ink on every microscopic dot but this can be done at high speed. So no matter how much of a rush you're in you'll always have outstanding photographic images. Nothing else does it better. Except of course reality itself.

The HP PhotoSmart and DeskJet printers.

hp
invent

OVERHEARD → **"This is one of the most brazen thefts of intellectual property even committed in the US."** A judge on ICrave.com, which bootlegged cable TV and put it online

TRENDSPOTTING

ABC Electronic (www.abc.org.uk), the independent auditing body, issues certificates to some of the most popular Web sites. Yahoo! UK (www.yahoo.co.uk) came top of the pops with a massive 106 million page impressions for the month of September. The breakdown of data showed that its home page received an average of over three million hits per working day.

Next came the Web sites of the BBC. BBC Online refers to the page impressions of all the publicly-funded BBC Web sites added together. BBC General is the number of page impressions for www.bbc.co.uk, and BBC News refers to page impressions at www.bbc.co.uk/news. The site of the World Service (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice) was also audited and received 2,891,974. News sites from Press Association, Electronic Telegraph , The Irish Times, ITN and The Times also scored well. Portals for many free ISPs also proved popular, including LineOne, Virgin Net and Beeb.

ABC Electronic defines page impressions as a file or a combination of files sent to the user as a result of a request being received by a server, so it's more accurate than looking at hits. A user is defined as being an individual IP address, cookie or other identifier that distinguishes different users visiting.

Traffic from Web development activities and requests by search engine indexers have been excluded. These aren't necessarily the UK's most popular sites, since the ABC only audits sites it has been asked to look at. But there's no doubt that these are the big boys.

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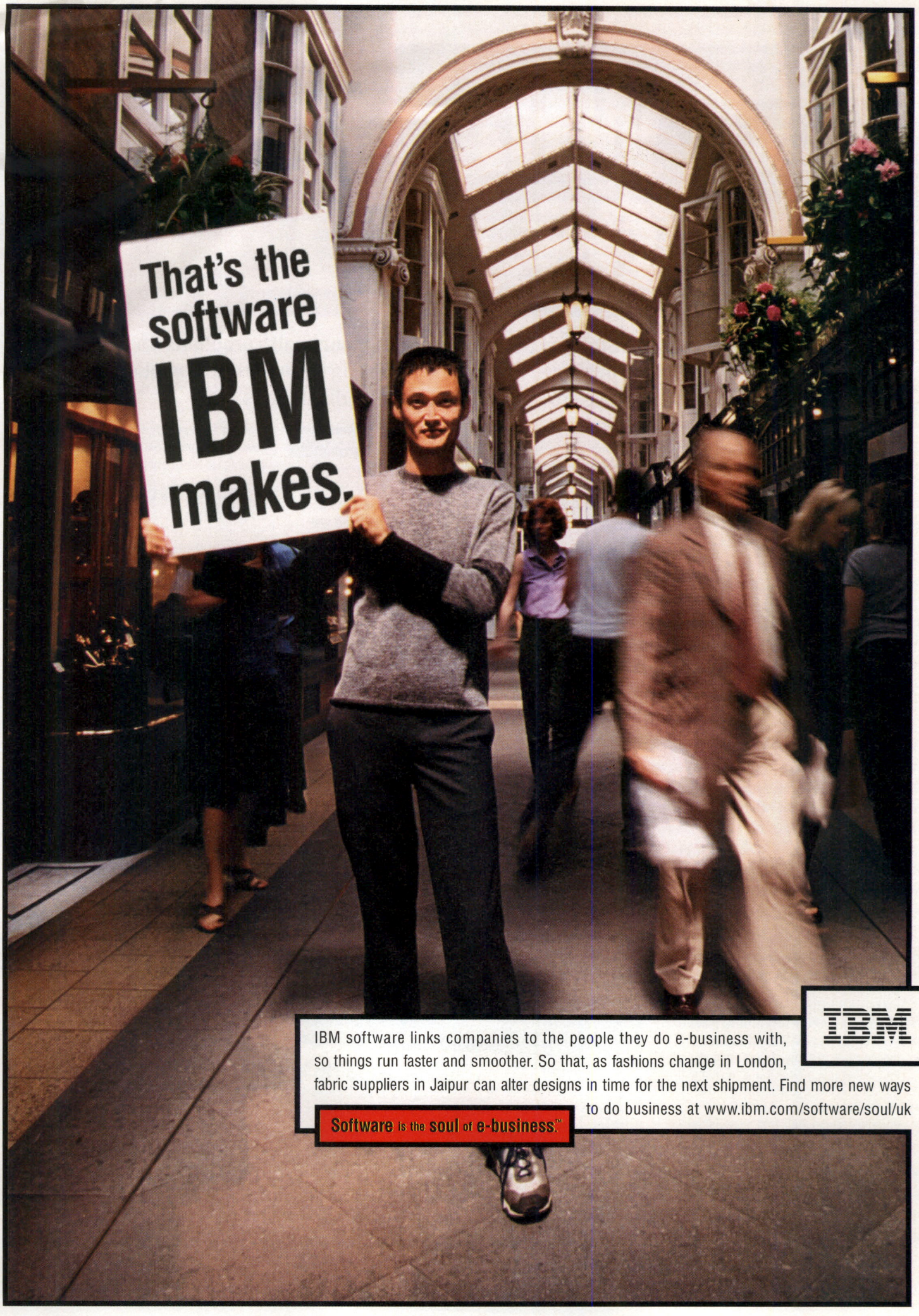
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JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

The aim of the NHS Direct Web site is to help you deal with your health problems from home. It's been a demanding project, but Steve Hill finds a promising resource that complies with a new government policy to improve browsing for people with disabilities

Ever since Tony Blair asked Bill Gates to No.10 for tea and biscuits, he seems to have become a disciple of everything to do with the Internet. The prime minister's stated, on a number of occasions, that the Net gives the government the opportunity to interact with its citizens and administer public services.

So it was surprising that he decided to use the lavish surroundings of a shopping centre in Bootle to announce the launch of the latest government communication tool – the NHS Direct Web site.

In case you haven't read a newspaper lately, NHS Direct started life as a telephone helpline service aimed at making it easier for patients to deal with health problems at home. The Web site, launched in December 1999, aims to support this by offering UK citizens health-related advice and acting as a portal to health-related material on the Internet.

The plan has received a lukewarm response from GPs, some of whom believe the site will break down the link between doctor and patient. Others believe the £3.75 million that was used to launch the site could've been spent on modernising the NHS in other ways.

The fact that the Web site will be inaccessible to many of the deprived and vulnerable people that need it most has also received criticism. But those who suffered from the winter flu epidemic, and people that have visited the site, might disagree.

The concept

Paul Jenkins, project manager at the Department of Health, says the idea for the site came from a number of different angles: "Health is a major area of interest to people on the Net."

To prove the point he produced a string of statistics from Cyber Dialogue (www.cyberdialogue.com) in the US. The research group estimates that the number of adults searching for health and medical information online will grow from around 17.1 million between July 1997 and July 1998 to over 30 million between July 1999 and July 2000. Jenkins says the same growth rates are expected across the UK and Europe.

March 2000 internet magazine Site of the Month

But there's also an issue with the quality of information online. "While there's a lot of good health information out there, there's also a lot of bad advice. We wanted to create a standard of quality for UK Web sites," says Jenkins.

Another angle was more obvious – to support the role of the NHS Direct telephone helpline, which handled over 250,000 enquires over the Christmas period alone.

"The site complements the telephone service. It's another way for the public to get health information. NHS Direct is the only large health Web site in the world that's supported by its government, and it offers 24-hour backing via the telephone."

NHS DIRECT

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

For its broad-based content and WAI compliancy, NHS Direct is our Site Of the Month.

DESIGNERS
iXL

DEVELOPMENT TIME
25 days

COST
£3.75 million

SIZE
100 Mb

NUMBER OF PAGES
Around 14,000 pages

LAUNCHED
December 1999

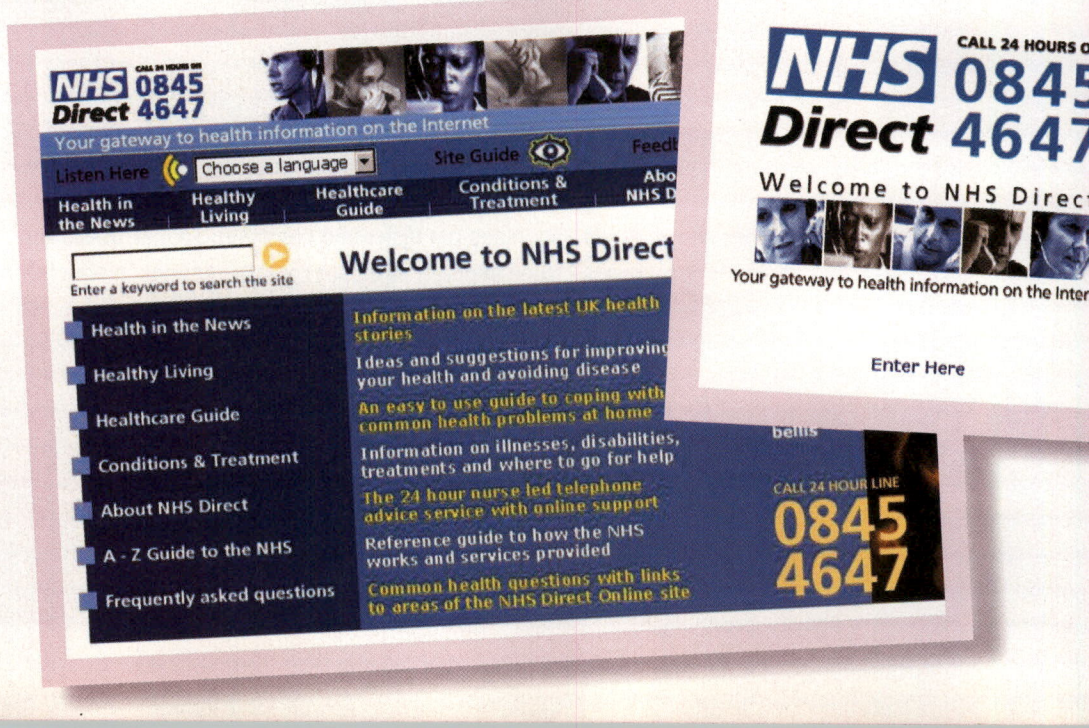
A plan comes together

In April, the job of creating the site was put out to tenure. Eight Web development companies responded, and iXL, whose clients include Xerox and WebMD, won the contract.

"We chose iXL because we thought it could achieve what we wanted within the tight deadline," says Jenkins. "We looked at the sites it'd designed for other clients and liked what we saw."

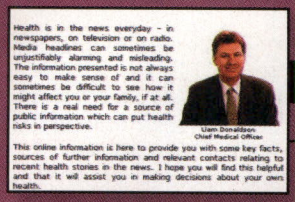
The discovery phase was started by iXL in August last year. It was decided that the site should be easily accessible to the widest possible audience.

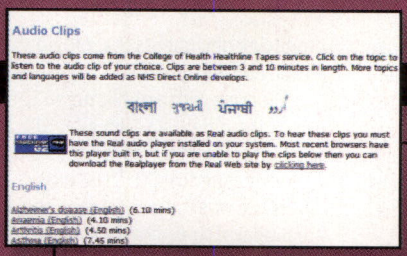
As part of the government's plan to bring the Net to underprivileged families, many browsers will be accessing the site from public libraries and clinics. This means they might not be using the most up to date

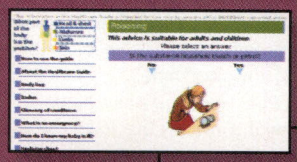


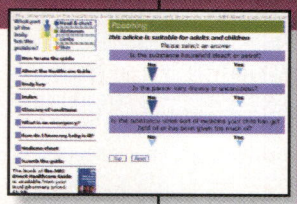
From initial sketches and early versions of the NHS Direct site, the pages were redesigned to be WAI-compliant (below)

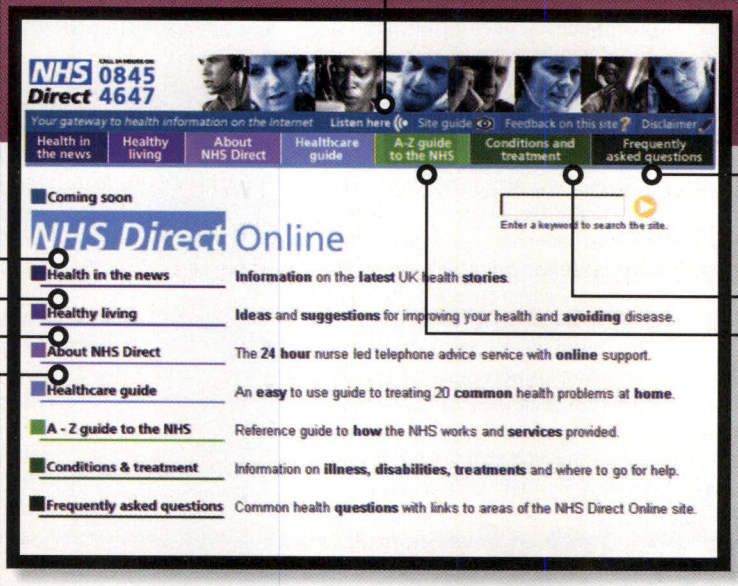
HOW IT WORKS

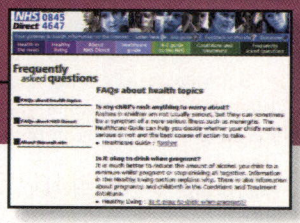


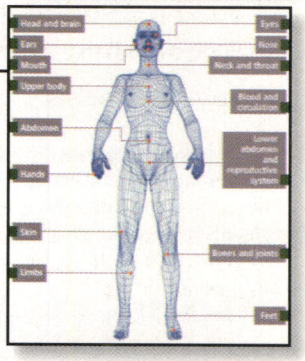


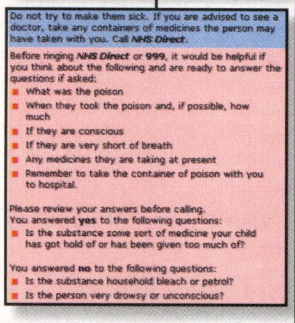


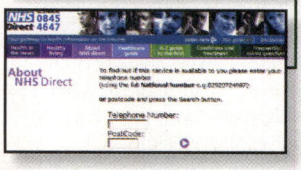


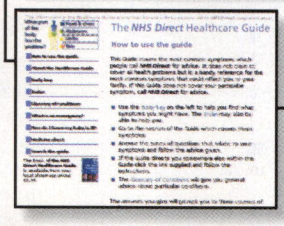


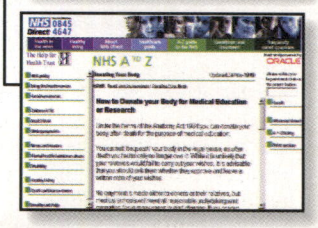








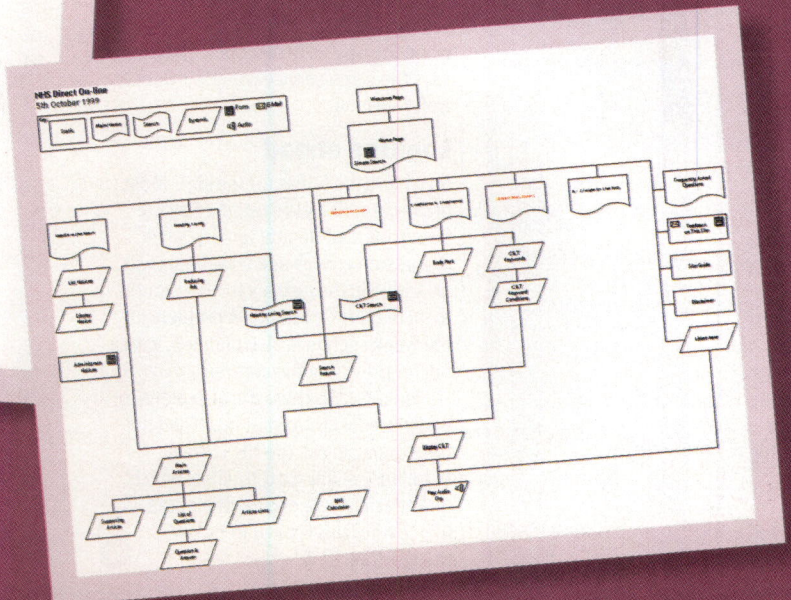




DESIGN PROFILE

iXL

iXL is one of the largest Web development companies in the world, with 20 offices around the globe. Since 1996, the company's created more than 3,000 Internet projects, ranging from $250,000 to $1 million engagements. Clients include Delta Air Lines, Chase Manhattan Bank, Cox Enterprises, General Electric and WebMD.



Sally Philip

Before joining iXL in November 1998, Sally Philip worked as a programming assistant for a TV and radio network operating in Russia. A graduate of Manchester University, she's worked as project co-ordinator and project manager for iXL. She's also worked for clients such as Xerox, Thistle Hotels and Virgin Atlantic Airlines, as well as a number of financial, insurance and ISP businesses. "The site had to be simple and clean, as well as disability-compliant, with fast download times. It also has a low browser spec for all PCs."

Paul Jenkins

Paul Jenkins is the national project manager of NHS Direct, based at the NHS Executive in Leeds. He's responsible for overseeing the introduction and development of the telephone helpline, which is due to be implemented across England by the end of 2000. Paul has been involved in a number of major national initiatives in the NHS and other areas of government. "People on the Net are interested about health. Traditional family networks are breaking down and many people are concerned about bothering their doctor."

computers. The site also had to be easy to use by those with sight impairments and other disabilities.

Content-rich

The site is grouped into seven sections, including health in the news, a healthy living guide (which covers how to cut down on smoking, quitting the habit, managing stress and healthy eating) and an A to Z guide to the NHS.

But while the site contains a wealth of information, you shouldn't expect precise answers to specific problems. "The site lets you make choices about your health care," says Jenkins. "We tend to avoid using the word diagnosis because the public uses it in a different way to doctors."

"We help people decide on a course of action, whether that's a trip to the chemist, a doctor or to a hospital."

The Department of Health worked with a range of highly specialised information providers to generate the content. The Health Education Authoring, for instance, developed the healthy living section. The conditions of treatment section came from The Centre for Health Information. The NHS Executive and the Help For Help Trust have also provided content. Each of these organisations specialised in producing documents that provided advice and information.

"Working with a public organisation wasn't too different to working with any of our other clients," says Sally Philip, project manager at iXL. "The big difference was the project required a great deal of co-ordination between all of the third parties. This included NHS groups that had been recruited to provide content, as well as the usual hardware and software organisations."

You can search the site using three different tools. The first is a map of the human body – if you have a pain in your abdomen, you click on that part of the body and it'll list the possible causes (such as back pain or poisoning). You can also search a directory of medical conditions, which are explained in plain English. The third search tool is a directory of specific medical terms.

Audio clips were provided by the College of Health telephone advice line service in a range of different languages. "It was relatively easy to convert the pre-digitised tapes once we decided that the most appropriate format was RealAudio 3," says iXL's Sally Philip.

"While there's a lot of good health information out there, there's a lot of bad advice."

The design

Setting the tone of the site was one of the first steps. "The design needed to convey a serious tone without being boring," says Paul Jenkins.

The site is primarily text-based and content-rich, so it needed to be simple to navigate. "We assumed a low browser specification among our users," adds Jenkins. "Usability was particularly important, so the site had to be simple and clean. It also needed to have fast download times."

NHS Direct is one of a new breed of government Web sites that have been created in a WAI-compliant format. WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative) is a scheme from W3C (the World Wide Web Consortium at **www.w3c.org**) that encourages developers to create sites that can be viewed by people with disabilities and sight impairments. It's based on the belief that the power of the Web is in its universality.

To keep things simple, the site's been created with a mix of HTML and Java. The majority of the site was designed in Dreamweaver, with one of the largest sections – the A to Z of the NHS – based around an Oracle database and stored on a Solaris server. The content was organised and tagged to go into a dynamic database.

What no email advice?

One criticism of the site has been that you can't get health advice via email. "We've been nervous about getting into the whole personal email thing because of confidential information passing over the Net," explains Jenkins.

"The security aspect of offering an email service is not insolvable, but it's something we'd need to look at carefully. How could we prevent people emailing us from outside the UK?"

Jenkins says the nurses who run the NHS Direct helpline have become skilled at giving advice over the phone. "The key thing has been paying close attention to what the patient's saying. The nurses also listen for what's happening in the background and take into account what the patient isn't saying. They've become experts in weighing up all the evidence." Jenkins says the same service wouldn't work as well via email.

Looking ahead

So what's the future for the site? Most of the content will be updated by the Department of Health. Jenkins says discussion groups and chatrooms will be added in the next six to nine months to increase interactivity. A problem of the week section is also planned, with a doctor providing the answers.

Jenkins says there are also plans to add more local information. "Over the Christmas period, the NHS Direct helpline was able to tell callers which pharmacies were open in their area. We aim to offer this type of thing over the Internet."

THE WEB ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE

In December 1999, cabinet office minister Ian McCartney announced a new government Web site policy that aims to open up a wealth of information and opportunity to visually impaired people. The policy aims to improve access to public services and advice for the whole country.

"The Web opens up a new world of information to blind and partially sighted people, but Web sites can be so poorly designed that specially adapted computers will not work with them," says Julie Howell, the RNIB's access to digital information campaigns officer. We hope these guidelines for government Web sites will be implemented quickly, so blind and partially sighted people can get equal access to information and fully participate in the democratic process."

Improving the Internet for people with disabilities

The NHS Direct Web site was one of the first to follow the government's new policy. The site is WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative) compliant according to a set of guidelines from W3C (**www.w3c.og**).

The initiative aims to help people with sight, hearing and mobility problems. It includes people who have trouble processing information, those who have difficulty reading or comprehending text, and people who cannot use a keyboard or mouse. WAI-compliant sites should also benefit browsers with text-only screens, small screens (such as PDAs) and slow Net connections.

W3C says content developers must make these considerations during page design. There are several situations to consider, but each design consideration benefits several disability groups at once and the Web community as a whole.

For instance, by using style sheets to control font styles, and by eliminating the font element, HTML authors have more control over their pages, so their Web sites become more accessible to people with sight impairments. Also, sharing the style sheets will reduce download times for everyone using the Net.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Sophie Greenfield
creative director
Agency.com
Overall, NHS Direct is a great concept. It has a simple layout, a clean design, and it's easy to read. The opening page looks a bit like a book cover, which is nice, but it's completely unnecessary. It could've been combined with a splash page in the main page design. The pictures at the top of the main page [of people talking on the phones] look nice, but they don't serve any purpose. The site's navigation could be improved. The menu structure and layout on the more information-intensive pages is confusing. The sound clips work well, even over a slow modem.
www.agency.com

Matt Groves
MD
64K
This site's aimed at 15 to 50 year olds, so you can't have anything too fancy. It needs to talk to people immediately, and it succeeds. There are some problems, though. The domain name is instantly forgettable and the site only seems to want to promote the helpline telephone number. The navigation in the top toolbar isn't great. A roll-over, which lets you see pull-down menus, could tell you what's in each section – which is a simple bit of JavaScript. The layout's clear and colour-coded, which will suit the target audience.
www.64k.co.uk

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MONEY FOR NOTHING

Charles Cohen, founder and chief technology officer and Philip Letts, chairman and CEO of beenz

Beenz is the revolutionary online currency that you can earn simply by visiting sites on the Web. Richard Dinnick talks to the founder and chairman of the company that's attracted over 600,000 customers and done deals with some of the biggest names on the Net

If you were going to start an Internet company, you'd want to attract top clients like Excite, MP3.com or Yalplay. You'd target e-commerce sites such as Shopgenie, Gameplay and eBookers. And you'd probably seek companies that are more famous for their physical world presence than their Web efforts, such as Honda, the RAC and MORI.

Beenz.com, in under a year of trading, has attracted all of these names, as well as a large number of other Web companies. And the list is still growing.

When beenz was launched last March, some observers said it was a good idea, but that it wouldn't last because someone with more clout was bound to come along, duplicate the business model and walk all over the start-up. It didn't happen.

"There's a fundamental difference between a loyalty or points scheme and what the analysts are calling e-currency," explains Charles Cohen, founder and chief technology officer of beenz. "That's what we've created. We have the only e-currency in the world."

Cohen set up the company in December 1998, and three months later – together with fellow beenz.com directors Philip Letts (chairman and CEO) and David King (senior vice president) – beenz.com launched simultaneously in the UK and US.

"We didn't call ourselves the Web's currency by accident – we've trademarked the strapline."

It was a big campaign, with most parts of the media covering the story. Beenz.com formed alliances with DoubleClick – one of the Internet's leading advertising companies – and Oracle, to continue the technology sharing and development of the company.

At the launch of beenz.com, Philip Letts estimated that there would be over a million beenz in circulation by May 1999. He also said the company would have 10 million active accounts by 2000. The reality is that while the number of beenz on the Web has grown to a massive 350 million, there were only slightly more than 400,000 accounts at the beginning of this year.

But the company has just completed a deal with Mondex – MasterCard's e-cash card – to create a smart card capable of carrying beenz. This represents a major step for an Internet company as it ventures away from the Web and onto the High Street. Mondex card users will be awarded beenz in shops as well as online.

What gave you the idea for beenz?

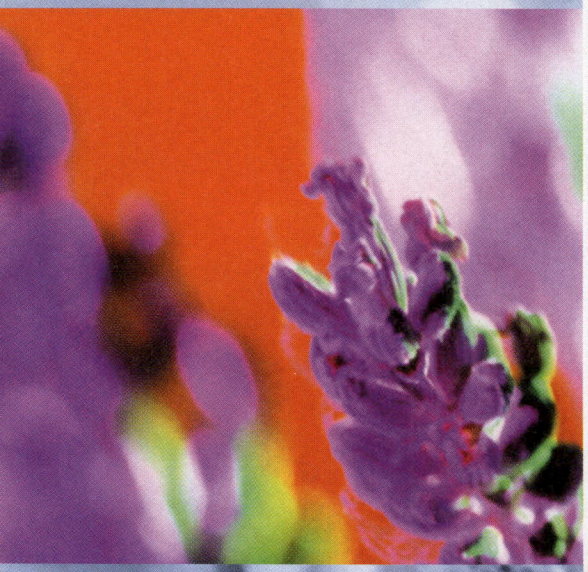
CC: It started out as an *uber* loyalty programme. I was frustrated with reward programmes that claimed to be currencies of some kind – I was earning points, but they weren't worth anything.

I thought it was a shame that there wasn't a standard for this kind of thing, where consumers would earn points and choose what they spent them on. The classic example of a bad system is the credit card. You receive »

Photography by Frank Rodgers

AMAZE

the Board



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a catalogue of things you can get with your points, but there's never anything you want, so they're useless.

I had this thing going round in my brain for a while and then, in late 1998, I got together with Phil [Letts], who knows more about business than I do. But I knew about technology, so we felt we could do something with the idea.

How easy was it to decide to let someone else run the company?

CC: I'd been running a business for about three years and I knew there was no way I could run beenz in a way that would deliver its potential, and I just happened to know Phil.

It's been an amazing year. As we're close to our anniversary, we started to look at what we've done and I said 'imagine if you'd been chief technical officer and I'd been CEO – we'd have made a right mess of it!'. I think the strength of the whole business lies in the initial partnership we have.

There are many businesses where the guys at the top don't quite have it. There's a bit of rivalry or there's a little bit of resentment or insecurity – it ripples through the whole organisation.

How did you finance the business?

PL: We funded it between ourselves until the middle of February 1999, and then we did our first round of finance raising. This involved people who knew us, as well as friends and family. Then, straight on the back of that, we did a professional round of financing that raised £3.6 million in March 1999. I think people believed our projections because there were so many layers of business and revenue that it makes profit fairly quickly and it's grown extremely fast.

Did you have to give up much of the company to raise that?

PL: You always have to give something away. The amount we sold was right, not too much. We still own and control the business after three rounds of investment. That's after we raised £30.5 million in the third round. Getting the money hasn't been hard, but getting the right money is a technique.

CC: Some people think giving away more than five per cent of their company is far too much. But if the business lacks investment and fails, they own 95 per cent of nothing. Another mistake is not believing in the value and potential of what you're doing.

We've managed to inspire confidence, which comes down to a combination of two things. You need to be sure that your idea can work – it's got to be easy to understand and there's got to be an obvious need for it. Once you've got your idea, you can build your management team, but never the other way round.

We had both from the beginning, and that came through good judgement. We're doing things in this business – in terms of our processes and communication – that you don't see for two or three years in a start-up. It's ben an amazing thing to watch from starting in a small room in a basement.

PL: We had 150 employees across three continents by Christmas 1999, and that's never been done before by a new business in one year.

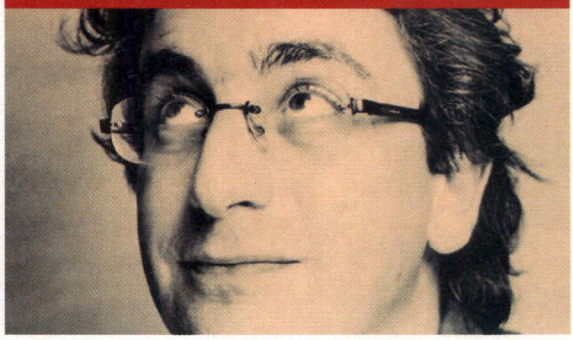
There have been other Web currencies, such as ipoints, but no one's taken you on. Why?

CC: You can now buy gift certificates with beenz. People are asking how we can do that. It's exactly the same as when we started out. People said 'that [beenz] sounds like one of the smart wallet companies', and I was trying to explain the difference. We signed up a smart wallet company in October 1999 – we're a currency! We didn't call ourselves the Web's currency by accident – we've trademarked the strapline. From not believing what we could do, and then not understanding the idea, people are getting it now.

Curriculum Vitae

Charles Cohen

- Born 1969
- **1992** Graduated from Oxford University in 1992 with BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
- **1992** Speech writer and policy advisor for Rt Hon. R Maclennan MP in the House of Commons
- **1994** Account executive at Band & Brown Communications
- **1996** Founder and MD of Thought Interactive, a subsidiary of Band & Brown Communications, which develops and implements Web marketing and site management technologies
- **1998** Founded beenz.com
- **1999** Launched beenz.com



"If I go to a Web site, why shouldn't I get paid for it? We've created a currency where you get paid for your work online."

Do you think beenz is a few steps away from the Internet Holy Grail of micropayments?

PL: There isn't a micropayment issue in the physical world. Why? Because we have currencies that work perfectly fine. The fact that we have a unit of currency that's small enough to work eliminates the need for micropayments. Now, because the Internet has beenz, micropayments aren't an issue. It's off the table. It's gone.

Do you see a day when you'll be able to charge a card or an account with beenz and buy a day's worth of viewing on an online paper?

PL: It's something you could do, but it's blue sky. The deal is, you earn your pounds by turning up for work and doing a job. The way we look at it, when you visit a business Web site, you're spending your time, effort and attention for them to extract value. If I walked into someone's office and did that, I'd expect to be paid, because that's called work. If you go to a Web site, why shouldn't you get paid for it? We've created a currency where you get paid for your work online.

CC: It's e-work. Beenz is e-currency. You get paid for e-work, then you go and e-shop.

But e-work is browsing?

CC: It's clicking and spending time online.

PL: So if you go to Excite, you get 10 beenz once a day for visiting that site. Excite will pay you to visit its site. Why? Because that's the way its business model works. Which should you go to – Yahoo!, which doesn't pay you, or Excite, which does?

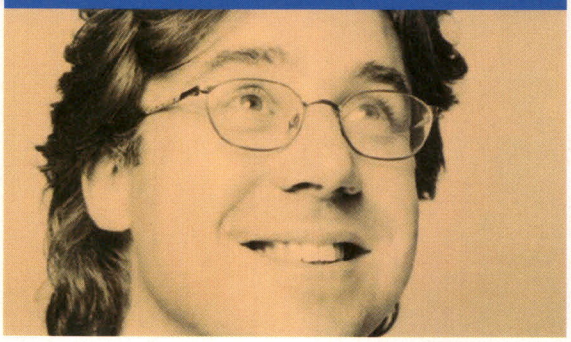
CC: The Internet economy is based on making money out of your eyeballs. The physical world isn't. That's the whole difference. Beenz is a currency that's based on your eyeballs.

But in a way, it's a reverse payment. If I went into my local

Curriculum Vitae

Philip Letts

- Born 1966
- **1991** Graduated from Buckingham University with a BSc in Business
- **1991** General manager at Unicom Seminars
- **1992** Co-founded CMI, a publishing and marketing IT management research firm
- **1992** CEO of CMI
- **1997** Joined Corechange, a US systems management company
- **1998** MD of Corechange UK and senior vice president of the Worldwide Management Committee of Corechange Inc
- **1999** Helped to launch beenz.com



shop and asked for a newspaper, they wouldn't say 'here's a fiver', they'd say 'that's 50p please'.

PL: Things are different in the physical world. On the Net, there's no physical effort involved in going to one site rather than another. That's the deal with globalisation – you just move your mouse and click. The reason micropayments won't work is because there's no value proposition to the consumer.

It's easier for me to keep paying my money at the 7-Eleven in the physical world while it's easier and cheaper than going elsewhere. So why make it harder and more costly for me on the Web? With beenz, there's a value proposition because of the way the economy works on the Net. You can now get paid for your time online – it's easy, anonymous and it makes sense.

Are you the voice crying 'this is how it should be done' and some people aren't listening?

CC: There's a role for micropayments where you're purchasing goods, services, information and value. But your time is your time, and we believe consumers should expect to be paid for it.

PL: Micropayment people have evolved into the smart wallet companies and I think two or three will find traction. We still need wallets – even today. I think there's a use for smart wallets, but you still need a currency to go inside them.

CC: I see beenz as a technological answer to a business problem – micropayments cost too much money to handle credit and debit. We asked, 'could we create some form of electronic cash that was completely virtual and totally software-based' and the answer was 'No, it just doesn't work'. I'm sure smart cards will come along as a solution to low value payment – low value purchase of goods and services in cash. We're turning that upside down.

Take Slate [Microsoft's online magazine] as an example. It launched for free and said it'd start charging for it in three months' time. But it was still getting money from advertising during this time. When it started charging for the magazine, sales went right down.

Three months later the magazine was back to being free. The figures went up again and the revenues followed. If you want people to come to your site, you can pay them in beenz and everyone's happy.

So is your vision of e-commerce that beenz will help people go on the Web and do their shopping online?

PL: How can sites like CNet justify a $400 million marketing campaign over the next couple of years when it's just a site for techies?

Beenz creates a paradigm shift. For consumers, it's a question of 'do I want to earn money online?'. Businesses. have a way of building relationships from inception – before you've even been to their site right up to the repeat, profitable customer.

CC: Marketing on the Web is a big, black hole – it's not based on research or analysis. But with beenz you get this fabulous way of winning customers, and once you've won them, you've also got a great way of solving payment issues. You need the stickiness, you want to get them doing things like filling out forms, playing games and buying things from your site.

Beenz ties all that together in this new business tool for Web sites. We have over 200 sites using beenz and there are over 100 more in the pipeline. We're doing almost as many transactions as the London Stock Exchange. People really believe what beenz will do for their sites now.

PL: Let me try to put it from a business perspective, because it might sound insane that we're trying to convince businesses to pay people for merely visiting their Web site. If you run a banner ad campaign you'll get a five per cent click through rate if you're lucky – but one or two per cent is probably a good rate. That means you're spending money on the 95 per cent of people who don't even visit your Web site, so it's highly inefficient.

A banner ad just brings someone to your site, but what do you do with them once you've got them? Beenz is considerably more effective for generating attention and behaviour.

A typical business can get into beenz for $1,000, or around £610. That buys you 100,000 beenz. All you need to do is copy and paste two lines of HTML into your Web page – that's it. No servers, no integration, no messing. Six hundred quid – bosh! – it's there.

You mentioned smart cards earlier. Do you see beenz moving into that?

CC: Of course. As the digital world moves into the physical world, beenz goes with it. We're working on things like smart cards and interactive TV, and they should be coming up soon.

A few companies have tried to integrate the digital and physical world, but we're probably the first people to come at it from this direction.

Like Amazon hasn't opened bookshops on the High Street?

CC: No. But watch this space.

PL: This year's going to be the 'clicks and mortar' year. If you talk to the investment bankers they'll tell you that the dot com start-up window is shutting. This year we're starting to see venture capitalists investing in big 'bricks and mortar' companies like they've never done before.

The point is, if you combine the physical assets with the virtual assets, you've got one hell of an advantage. The physical companies haven't learned how to play it in the virtual world yet. But they're going to learn that stuff and it'll be interesting to see what happens to businesses. What will they do? Will they merge?

I think you're going to see some big mergers this year [this interview was conducted before the AOL/Time Warner merger], some big shakeouts and some big companies getting it right on the Web.

The distinction between e-commerce and commerce is invalid. Most of the purchases you make are by digital transfer anyway. The fact that you happen to be standing in the store at the time, rather then sitting at your PC, doesn't make any real difference.

CC: So with this 'clicks and mortar' idea, all commerce is e-commerce. You'll just choose where you shop. The transfer will be electronic. And beenz will be there.

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YOUR INTERNET PRESENCE IS OUR REPUTATION

No laughing matter

The Internet banks are spending vast amounts of money to win us over to the benefits of banking online. But, as Steve Hill has found, they need to improve their quality of service if they want to convert a sceptical UK public into happy customers

In December last year, a tabloid newspaper alleged that First-e (www.first-e.com), a Dublin-based Internet bank, was unable to find the owners of deposits worth £300,000.

A spokesman for the bank quickly denounced the story as "rubbish" and said the money wasn't credited to anyone's account because the data that accompanied it – such as account numbers, sort codes and customer information – was missing or incorrect.

But with concern about online security rampant among the public, the damage that this story's caused to First-e's reputation (and Internet banks in general) is difficult to underestimate.

In October I switched my account to Smile (www.smile.co.uk), the much-hyped online service from Co-operative. I was fed up with Halifax, my branch-based bank. It started to charge a penalty fee of £1 every time you withdrew money from another bank's ATM.

Two years ago, a friend showed me an online service from a US bank called First Union (www.firstunion.com). Apart from being able to perform routine transactions online, it let you trade shares and pay your bills from the Web. Fantastic, I thought. No more wasted hours spent queuing in my local branch, and no more begging for an overdraft from a spotty 18 year old with biro marks all over his hands.

Smile's sign-up process was simple. You fill in a short form online, tick a few boxes and send it by email. Smile replied within minutes to say I'd been accepted.

But things soon started to go wrong. On the first few days I tried to access my account the system was down. The only explanation for this was a message that said the service would be resumed within an hour. I gave up after waiting a whole evening without any change. Smile had committed its first customer service sin – it had lied to me. But it had just launched and I put this down to teething trouble.

Not so. The service has been slow, and it's not uncommon for my Net connection to time out during a transaction. This was worrying, because I couldn't tell whether the data I'd entered had been correctly processed. It transpired that my credit card bill hadn't been paid, which led to a hefty interest fee. I seem to be losing money after switching to Smile .

Unlike many online banks in the US, Smile doesn't offer printed confirmation of the transactions you've made. It's therefore difficult to provide enough evidence that you've made any changes.

If you're considering switching to a online bank, it's worth remembering that you do all the hard work. You fill in the forms online and you pay the phone bill for looking at your account on the Web.

Banking online might mean you never have to stand in a queue at your branch-based bank again, but when Smile is being slow, you spend a lot of time waiting, and this is adding to the cost of your phone bill.

Each transaction you make over the Net is estimated to cost the banks just one-tenth of a branch-based transaction, so it's not surprising that Smile's keen to recruit new customers with those annoying adverts.

It also means the banks can slash the number of staff they employ. The move towards telephone, postal and online bank accounts is estimated to have cost 200,000 jobs and the closure of over 3,600 branches in recent years. Another 3,000 branches are expected to close within the next five years.

I thought Smile would speed up the time it took for my cheques to be credited. I was wrong. If you need to pay money into your account, you have to either send Smile a cheque by post or pay cash at the post office – hardly high-tech. Your money then takes around three to four working days to clear, which is no faster than a branch-based bank.

Most bizarrely, credit card payments from the Smile account also take four days – even if, like me, you have a co-operative credit card. It's all electronic money, so why can't payments be pushed through faster?

The future of online banking is uncertain. According to data from the US, users said they began banking online to save time. But more than 50 per cent have cancelled their service because they were dissatisfied with the level of customer service or poor site navigation.

UK banks need to start listening to their customers. While the savings are great for the banks, few of them are passing the benefits to the customer. In my experience, Smile seems to have little more to offer than a high street bank, with poorer levels of service. If it doesn't improve soon, I'll be back in the queue at my local branch of Halifax.

"Smile had committed its first customer service sin – it had lied to me."

Steve Hill is news and features editor of *Internet Magazine*. He can be contacted at steveh@internet.emap.com.

mailbox

Email us and have your say feedback@internet.emap.com

Clearing up domain facts

I'm writing to clarify Nominet's position following your *Domain Man* feature (December 1999). Anyone with technical capabilities can register a domain name direct with Nominet, as you said, but this only costs £80 – there's no additional registration fee.

I'd also like to point out the difference between a registry and a registrar. A registry is responsible for maintaining the database for domain names. A registrar is one of the numerous organisations (such as ISPs) that offer domain name registration as part of their service.

The references to 'buying' and 'selling' domain names can also be misleading. Domain names are registered for a two-year rolling period, giving the registrant the right to use them for that period of time. Strictly speaking, you never 'own' a domain name.

The need to clarify domain name issues grows with the rise in registration numbers, and Nominet appreciates the role played by *Internet Magazine* in this – keep up the good work.

Dr Willie Black
MD, Nominet UK

Mother, I'm safe from viruses

I'm feeling somewhat wiser after reading your article on *How to stay safe from viruses* (January 2000). But why pay for an anti-virus package when you can get one for free?

At the Computer Associates Web site (**www.cai.com**) you can download a high quality anti-virus tool for your PC that'll scan files, email attachments and downloads.

The InoculateIT Personal Edition comes with free software updates and free Internet email support for registered users. Tell your readers, tell your mum, go tell it on the mountain.

Glenn Williams
Glenn.xxx@get2net.dk

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The danger of making predictions...

While reading back issues of *Internet Magazine* for ideas and techniques for my Web site, I was distracted by a letter in your February 1999 issue.

James Powell was singing the praises of Freeserve, and while there's nothing wrong with this ISP if it suits your requirements, his closing comments made me smile: "You wait – by this time next year they'll all be free," he said.

Well, Mr Powell, a year has passed, and all the ISPs aren't free. I wonder why? I suppose it could be the fact that, like most things in life, you get what you pay for. I wonder what Mr Powell's predictions are for the next 12 months?

Jaimie Dobson
jaimie@jdobson.globalnet.co.uk

Tanya Kreisky replies: Mr Powell was one of many people predicting the death of subscription ISPs, Jaimie. It'd be interesting to know his reaction now. But perhaps you have predictions of your own...

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Well done Screaming.net

I'd like to echo James Taiwo's appreciation of Screaming.net (January 2000) – just in case your readers thought he was the only person to support the ISP.

I was also quick to criticise Screaming.net – it was appalling to start with. I felt I'd been duped into signing up with the lure of free connection and lower call charges.

But login is now often first time and the download speeds are respectable, for which it should be commended. Screaming.net's pioneering stance on free calls is now fact and not fable.

Jason Lallman
jasonmymail@yahoo.co.uk

You can download free anti-virus software from www.cai.com

More problems with Netscape...

I agree with Alastair Mack's letter in the February 2000 issue of *Internet Magazine*. Netscape's interpretation of pages leaves a lot to be desired. The forms look cumbersome when you reduce their size with styles, and the cross-browser workarounds in JavaScript always seem to need twice as much code as other browsers.

Ben Miller
ben@hyl.co.ukben@hyl.co.uk

...and that nasty Internet Explorer

I have to disagree with Alastair Mack's opinion of Netscape Navigator (February 2000). This elegant product is being throttled by Internet Explorer just because the latter's included with Windows.

Trying to preview pages that you've created in Dreamweaver is a nightmare with IE because it opens a new window every time, which clutters the taskbar and leaves you twiddling your thumbs while it gets its act together.

It's also difficult to get rid of once you've installed it. The only good things I can find to say about Explorer are that it caches pages well and provides an option for renaming a Bookmark, sorry Favourite, before saving it.

IE doesn't always do the basics well either. For instance, GIF animations are often displayed incorrectly – at a slower speed with a jerky motion. And why do you need to see the invisible border around a link when you click on it?

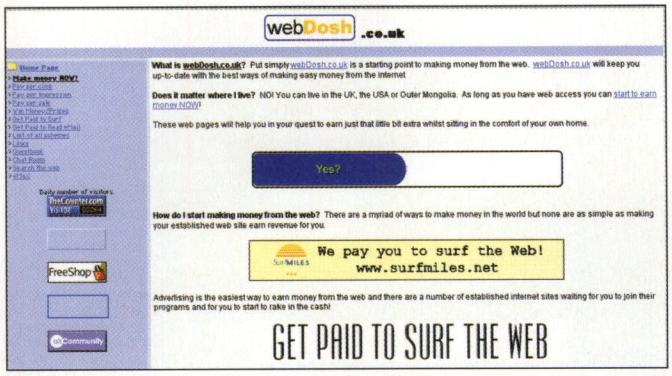
Cross-browser incompatibilities aren't really the issue for me. I just want an easy to use browser that interprets the code how I want it to.

Alan Edwards
alan@starbank.demon.co.uk

BT cancels bank holidays

I've checked my phone bill following letters that appeared in *Internet Magazine* about BT's call rates. On Bank Holiday Monday in August (1999) I spent over six hours online with BT ClickFree.

I assumed this was cheap rate access, as I did on 29 December 1999 and 3 January 2000. Not likely – I was charged weekday rates.



Fancy getting paid for browsing the Web – see www.webdosh.co.uk to find out how

When did BT tell its users that bank holidays are cancelled when it comes to its access charges?

The greedy Scrooge cancelled goodwill and clawed the profit from unsuspecting users. I support *Internet Magazine* and follow the push for 0800 access closely. BT needs to address the requirements of its UK customers and stop the 'nanny knows best' approach.

Simon Paul
Paul@uknets.co.uk

I get paid for browsing the Net

I've been using the Net for 'free' for over six months. You start by saving 20 per cent with BT Friends and Family if you make your ISP your Best Friend. That leaves you with 48p per hour cheap rate. There are several ways to pay for this.

Cash bars take up around one inch of your screen and flash adverts at you. They're quick to load and you won't notice any drop in the speed of your connection.

A company called Ignifuge pays you 13p every time you open your browser with its page as your home page. You can also get paid for receiving junk mail, then delete it without even reading it.

I use a number of these schemes to earn £2.68 per hour just for being on the Net. That easily covers BT's costs, and I have some left over for a beer or two. I've set up a Web site that details how to do this at **www.webdosh.co.uk**.

Chris Harper
chris.harper1@virgin.net

All present and correct

Your opinion piece in the January issue of *Internet Magazine* was one of the few articles I've seen over the past 18 months that's been 100 per cent factually correct. Many thanks – we've had a lot of feedback as a result of it.

Alastair Scott, Campaign for Unmetered Telecommunications
www.unmetered.org.uk

It's good to listen

I'm writing in response to letters complaining about BT Internet's 0800 service (January 2000). The service started well, but it got gradually worse as more people joined. It's improved a lot, though, and I'm pleased with the current service, which I use mostly for online gaming.

When it was faltering, my friends and I wrote several letters of complaint, which were all ignored. It's this disregard for the consumer that angers me. The 0800 access works fine, but BT's customer service needs to improve or people will move to other ISPs.

Mike Stafford
Mike.Stafford@btinternet.com

Defending BT ClickFree

Regarding letters in your January 2000 issue, BT ClickFree isn't that bad. It's not that good, but it's not that bad. Over the Christmas period, access was free for over two and a half weeks. Even the usual two-hour restriction was dropped.

I left my PC online for 78 hours, which didn't cost me anything! During the day I browse with Wireplay, which gives great downloads because its core users (online gamers) only use it after 7pm. People who moan about the telco should take responsibility for their naivety and not take it out on BT, which has always been all image and no delivery.

Andy Jones
Andy.Jones@Falcon-e.co.uk

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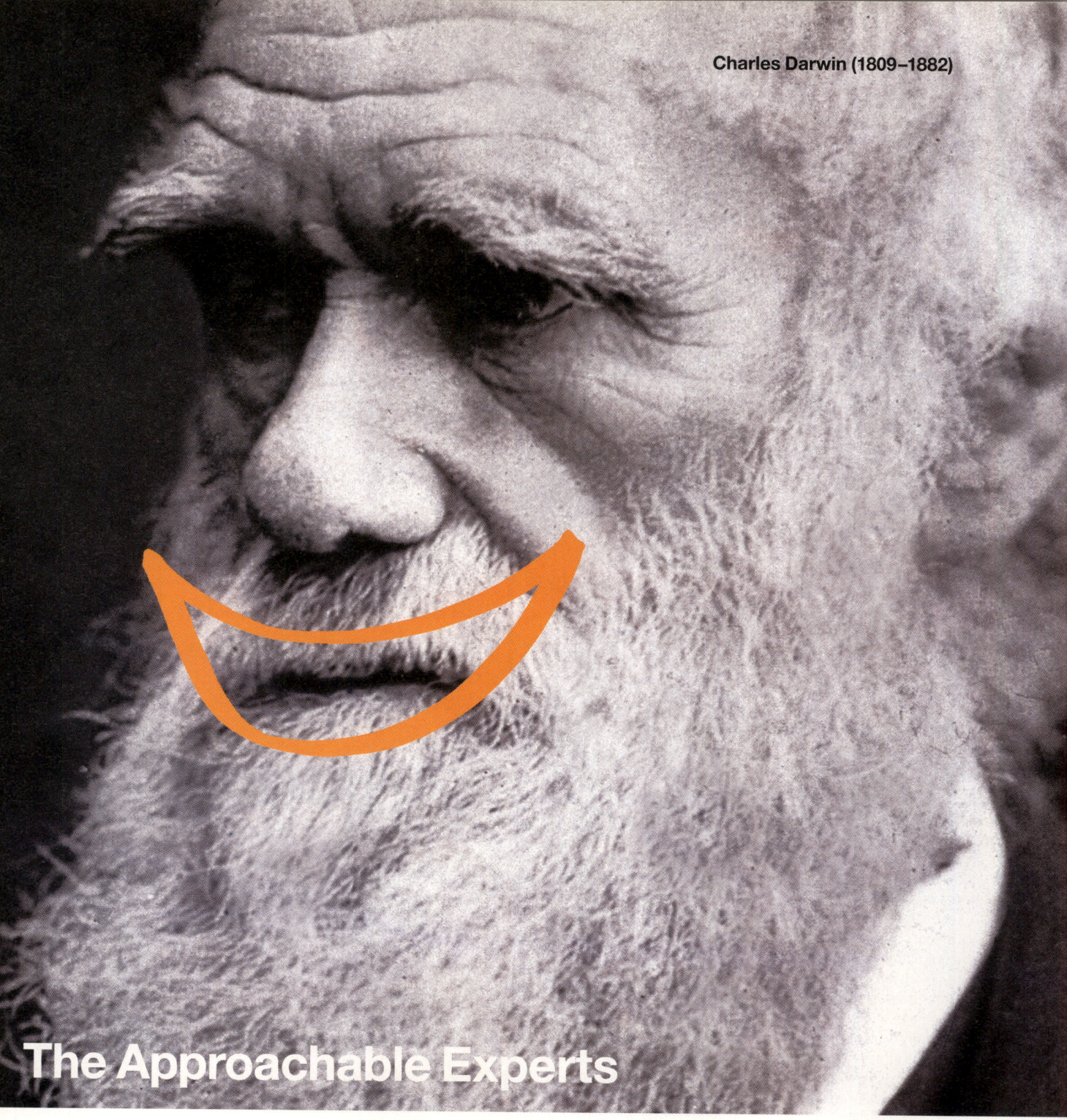

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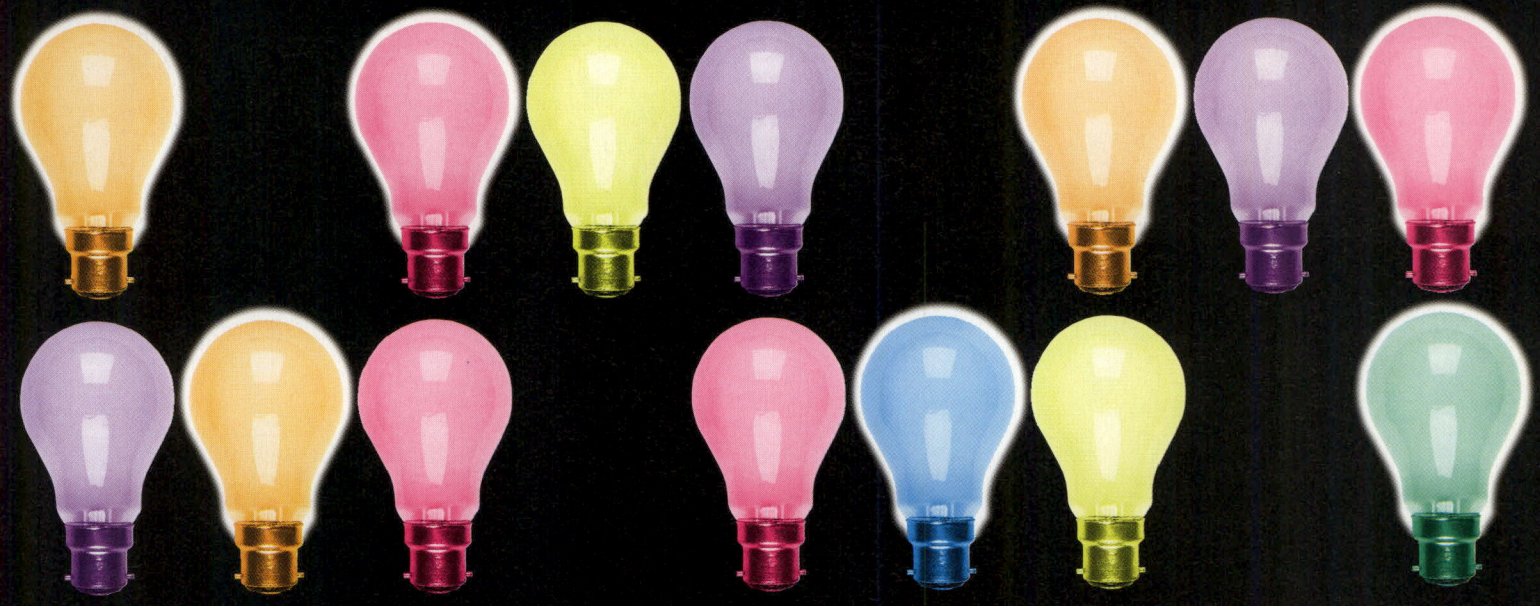
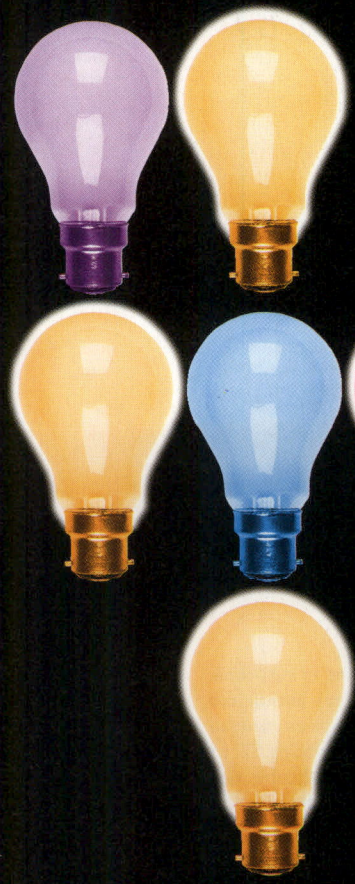


INSPIRED!

We've compiled a list of essential tips for designing your Web site, as well as the major pitfalls to avoid. We've also persuaded top Web design experts to share their secrets – top tricks to spice up a site, what not to do, the software to use, and the sites they love and loathe



Job definition

01 If you think being a designer is just about creating graphics, think again. Content, which includes its function and what your audience hopes to do with it, is your number one consideration. Your whole design should revolve around that.

Simple Simon

02 Your audience on the Web has the attention span of a five year old. If they can't view your site quickly, and navigate around it easily, they'll soon get frustrated. Don't make them give up and go to your rival's site.

God save the King

03 Content is king. There was a terrible time around two years ago when corporate sites were like glossy advertising brochures. To make matters worse, they used huge graphics that took ages to download.

Design exists to bring your content to life and make it clearer to read and understand. Channel 5's Web site (www.channel5.co.uk) is a triumph in terms of design, but the content is poor and it takes far too long to find the information you want.

Final countdown

04 There's nothing worse than a site that takes ages to download. As a rule of thumb, a standard Web page should be no larger than 60Kb, which will take about 30 seconds to load over a 56K modem. Some designers say Web page should only take 15 seconds to load.

Move that mountain

05 Keep an eye on how your site's being served. A host that's performing well one month can be dragged down by its popularity. But moving your Web site has to be planned carefully if you don't want to lose visitors. Check our Web host speed tests (on page 151).

Back to basics

06 You can create a reasonable-looking Web site without knowing anything about HTML. All you need is a WYSIWYG home authoring package such as Adobe PageMill (£51 from www.adobe.com) or Microsoft FrontPage Express (free with Internet Explorer).

But these packages are often accused of producing unnecessary HTML that slows down your site. To truly succeed in Web design you will need to understand how HTML works. Most designers advise newbies to grab a book on HTML (Elizabeth Castro's *HTML For The World Wide Web* is a good, uncomplicated read) and start producing Web pages in Notepad.

Package holiday

07 If you write the HTML yourself, you're in control of the design process. But if you're just starting out in Web design, go for a package that lets you change the HTML. HomeSite 4 (£70 from www.allaire.com) was the Best Buy in our labs test of basic Web design programs (January 2000). It's an excellent program that helps you learn HTML by writing it direct. It also lets you switch to WYSIWYG mode so you can see a preview of your site before you post it on the Web.

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08 **"Do it again and stop thinking you know it all, because you don't. No one does."**
Richard Beaumount, flg21

The mighty pen

09 "The pen is mightier than the sword," said someone who had never been mugged in a dark alley. Draw a sketch of your site, with all the pages shown in relation to each other, before you go anywhere near your computer. Planning how your visitors will navigate your site is time well spent.

10 **"You'll never find a good idea in your computer."**
Guy Timewell, pres.co

Maps online

11 Many Web designers put their site maps online. The jury is still out regarding the benefit of this. Most of your visitors will be looking for specific information – they're not interested in how your site works. If you think your site needs a map, you probably need to improve its navigation and toolbars.

12 **"Open your eyes. Take a look at everything. Observation of the most irrelevant things can turn out to be the best inspiration. Look at a site as a construction as well as its design. Understand the key elements of site structure and make sure your design is based intelligently around the navigation."** **Margaret Manning, Reading Room**

Click here

13 Heard of the three-click rule? For smaller sites, no piece of information should be more than three clicks away from your home page. If you've got a large site, use icons and toolbars to improve navigation.

Font frenzy

14 While you can specify fonts in your HTML, you can't predict how they'll look in your visitors' browsers. What looks great on your PC could look awful on a different platform. Some Web authors use the <fontface> tag to specify preferences. It lets you specify which fonts to use, as well as alternatives in case your chosen fonts aren't installed on your visitors' PCs. Cascading Style Sheets can help solve this problem, but bear in mind that only the latest versions of the big browsers support CSS.

15 **"Use sensible naming conventions. How many times have you seen photos that are called 'buildingnewMarch99Dave1a FromPrinter.gif'?"**
Neale Hall, SP New Media

Check your mestaks

16 Good spelling is a useful skill to have in life, but it's sadly lacking among many designers. Make sure you spellcheck your site and learn to notice which words you regularly mistype.

Text-heavy

17 Lots of text-only screens on one site can be dull, boring and a waste of the Web's potential. If you've got large, text-based documents, put the files in an Adobe Acrobat format so your visitors can read them offline.

Don't wanna scroll with it

18 People hate scrolling on the Net. The Web site of Trouble, the kid's cable channel (**www.trouble.co.uk**), is a prime example of bad design. It's based around a floating frame, and browsers have to scroll down the page to read all the text. This only frustrates visitors, and it won't be long before they go elsewhere.

Big disappointment

19 You should have a clear introduction to your site that explains what's on offer. If visitors browse around the site, they'll probably find out, but most people aren't prepared to do this. Effective toolbars and a search tool will make it easier for people to find information on your site. To be a hit with your audience, tell them what you offer and make sure you give it to them.

20 **"Get an understanding of the basics – it'll prove invaluable later. Start slapping up your own site, warts and all. There's no quicker way to learn than by your own mistakes and by listening to the advice and feedback of others."**
Mike Slocombe, Urban 75

Tense, nervous – headache

21 Using <blink> tags bring attention to a specific section of your page, but it'll also give your visitors a headache. This might be great news for the makers of Anadin, but it's bad news if you want repeat visitors.

22 WHAT DESIGN LESSON HAVE YOU LEARNT THE HARD WAY?

"The most important learning for anyone is that quality takes time and thought." **Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA**

"Saving your work often." **Neale Hall, SP New Media**

"Mechanical engineering has surprisingly little to do with industrial design." **David Streeke, Deepend**

"Never listen to a client who declares no interest in the design of their site – they don't mean it!" **Margaret Manning, Reading Room**

"Designing for your own company takes too long as you're always busy doing it for clients." **Julian Jordan, Fish**

"Never trust a techie." **Richard Beaumount, flg21**

"To produce good work you need a good client." **Guy Timewell, pres.co**

"Never use Rockwell [the font]." **Derek Scanlon, iXL**

"Whatever you do – it could be done better next time. However much you'd like to, you can't do everything yourself." **Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com**

"Liberally strew your workspace with backups of back ups of backups, then do some more backups. Don't experiment with a search and replace tool on the master copy of your site." **Mike Slocombe, Urban 75**

Background blunders

23 Apart from making a page hard to read, coloured backgrounds often add little to your site. Depending on your audience, you should stick with a white (or light) background and black (or dark) text. You should also stick to regular fonts if you want your site to be taken seriously.

Confused? You will be

24 Forcing your visitors to use only the Forward and Back buttons for navigation should be avoided. Your design should let visitors find what they want quickly. Most good sites have the

DO YOU HAVE ANY DESIGN REGRETS?

"Don't regret, just learn." **Neale Hall, SP New Media**

"The constraints that the Web's sometimes flawed technical capabilities constantly impose on design." **Margaret Manning, Reading Room**

"No, just a few early embarrassments." **Julian Jordan, Fish**

"Only the ones where a perfectly good solution is chopped, changed and butchered by a committee of suits." **Richard Beaumount, flg21**

"No. I've learnt from every wrong decision I've made." **Guy Timewell, pres.co**

"Every day there are things I wish I'd done better – that's what drives me." **Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com**

"There's never enough time to do all the mad projects I have in my head, nor will I ever get the opportunity to author a Cardiff City: Champions of Europe Web site." **Mike Slocombe, Urban 75**

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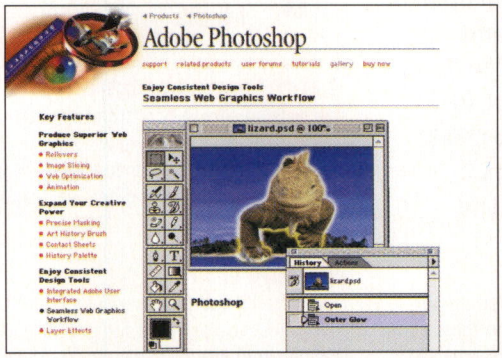
www.madasafish.com for details

25 WHICH SOFTWARE DO YOU USE IN THE CREATION OF YOUR SITES?

We asked our panel of top designers to vote for their favourite Web design software. Here's the top tools the professionals use to build the best sites, plus the ones that nearly made it

1 Adobe Photoshop
2 Macromedia Flash
3 Adobe Illustrator
4 Adobe ImageReady
5 Dreamweaver
6 Macromedia Fireworks
7 Allaire HomeSite
8 Microsoft Notepad
9 Macromedia Director
10 Lightwave
11 Macromedia Freehand

AND THE ALSO RANS...
Adobe Acrobat Exchange, Allaire ColdFusion, BBEdit, GlobalSCAPE, HTML Validator, Inertia Eyedropper, JPEG Optimizer, Macromedia Shockwave, Microsoft Access, Microsoft FrontPage, MySQL, Terran Mediacleaner



Adobe Photoshop – the preferred tool of professional designers

same toolbar on every page, in the same position (without using frames), which gives browsers access to all parts of the site from any page.

26 "Stick to your convictions. Be observant. Avoid the obvious. Never stop learning."
Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com

Count me out

27 You should think carefully about putting a visible hit counter on your Web site. You've designed your site to serve your visitors – not to boost your own ego about how many hits you're getting. Most browsers think hit counters are meaningless, and they can easily be doctored, so they won't impress advertisers, either.

Also, counters include hits from search engines and Web crawlers, so they're not even accurate. If you want to show how popular your site is, a better bet is to provide a link to an page showing analysis of your access logs.

28 "Get even smaller GIFs for banner adverts, edit the colour palettes by hand, and painstakingly remove the least used colours."
Julian Jordan, Fish

You've been framed

29 Just like counters, frames are now a definite *faux pas* on Web pages. At one time, most sites had a frame on the left-hand side of the screen. But designers soon discovered the problems that came with using frames. It's almost impossible to display a site with frames without a 17-inch monitor. Frames also make it impossible to Bookmark individual pages within a site. Perhaps most importantly, search engines are often confused by frames, so they don't list your site – which is unthinkable.

Graphic turn-off

30 Make sure visitors who have graphics turned off (in their browser) get a meaningful experience at your site. Even people with an ISDN connection turn off graphics to get better page loading performance. You can cater for them by providing text links at the bottom of your pages and using alternative text instead of images.

31 "Keep your head in the clouds and your feet firmly on the ground."
Guy Timewell, pres.co

Graphic overload

32 Some sites are missing a great trick by using a large graphic and never repeating it. Using the same graphic more than once on a page is a great way of building your branding and – once they're cached – they'll reload almost instantly.

Size matters

33 Don't use graphics that span the whole width of the screen. Your visitors will have to scroll to the right to see them – 75 per cent of the screen width is a good measurement.

34 "Avoid gimmicks."
Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA

Animation for the nation

35 Visitors with slower computers find that animated icons gobble up system resources, making it difficult to navigate your site. Give people the choice of skipping the Flash animation.

Flash harry

36 Most Web designers believe we've only seen the tip of the iceberg in terms of what Flash can do. The great news is that Netscape 5 will support Flash, so you won't have to download any plug-ins. But you should still resist the temptation to create whole interfaces with Flash. See the Granada TV site (**www.g-wizz.net**) for an example of Flash overkill – it doesn't even let you skip the opening animation sequence.

37 "Use white space to attract attention. Too much notice is drawn to something by making it flash, blink, spin or pirouette. Surrounding it with plenty of white space can attract far more attention." Margaret Manning, Reading Room

Blunt pencil

38 Make sure your animations are relevant to your content. They should blend into your Web site and not stand out like a sore thumb. Animations shouldn't just be a showcase for what you can achieve in Macromedia Director.

Wired for sound

39 The use of sound also comes with a warning, and embedded sound is becoming another no-no on the Web. It slows download times and adds little to the browser's Web experience. Mouseover sounds might be funny the first time you hear them, but they soon become irritating. Ask yourself whether sound will add anything to your site.

40 "Never drink at lunch time, unless it's a Friday."
Derek Scanlon, iXL

Java palaver

41 Use Java and ActiveX sparingly on your home page. Not everyone who visits your page will be able to see it. Spare a thought for browsers who use early versions of Netscape and Explorer. Mac owners also have problems dealing with Java. Excessive use of Java can crash a Mac, which won't encourage those visitors to return to your site.

Plug me in

42 Be careful not to limit the number of people that can view your site. Making a site dependent on particular plug-ins reduces its appeal. If visitors don't have the required plug-in, they'll need to download it from another site, but they might not come back.

43 WHAT'S THE BEST DESIGNED SITE YOU'VE EVER SEEN?

www.bmw.co.uk "For its breadth of content and relevance to the brand." Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA

www.hoover.co.uk Neale Hall, SP New Media

www.yugop.com "Technically brilliant and graphically strong." David Streeke, Deepend

www.yugop.com "For its stunning use of Macromedia Flash." Margaret Manning, Reading Room

www.dreamcast-europe.com Julian Jordan, Fish

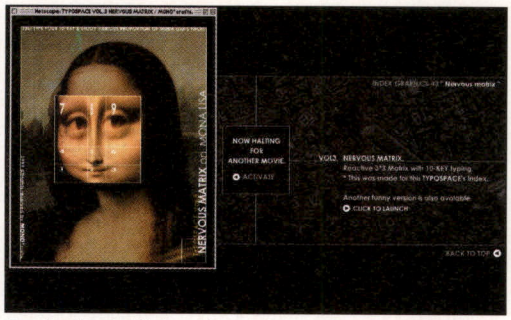
www.newsunlimited.co.uk, www.newbeetle.com and www.swoon.com Richard Beaumount, flg21

www.viaduct.co.uk "Merges clarity, style and movement – a pleasure to explore." Guy Timewell, pres.co

www.comicrelief.org.uk "It has a tangible human value. Good design is simply a visual solution to a problem." Derek Scanlon, iXL

www.yugop.com Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com

"I can't say I've ever found one design to be the best ever." Mike Slocombe, Urban 75



Fast-loading breakthrough use of Flash at www.yugop.com

44 WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TOOL?

"The Microsoft suite of Internet applications." Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA

"Dreamweaver – it balances layout design and hardcore HTML." Neale Hall, SP New Media

"Adobe Photoshop, of course." Richard Beaumount, flg21

"Marker pen and paper, then Flash." Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com

"HomeSite, for keeping a tight control on your code and maintaining complex sites – it's the best I've ever used." Mike Slocombe, Urban 75

...AND YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE?

"Fireworks. It's Macromedia's poorest product." Neale Hall, SP New Media

"Microsoft Explorer." Margaret Manning, Reading Room

"If you don't like it, don't use it. Find your own way." Richard Beaumount, flg21

"The Photoshop plug-ins that put drop shadows and glows around everything." Guy Timewell, pres.co

"Netscape – for its interpretations of CSS." Mike Slocombe, Urban 75

Freak or unique?

45 If you have sound or video on your site, make sure people can hear or see it using a well-known plug-in. Many sites use QuickTime, RealPlayer and Shockwave, which browsers are more likely to have on their PCs. Your visitors don't want to waste time and money downloading an obscure plug-in that they're only likely to use once.

Do try and keep up

46 Keep up with new technology. The Web never stands still, so dedicate some of your research time to new products and developments.

Jailhouse rot

47 Only use images, sound and text that you've created yourself, or taken from one of the sites that provide royalty-free graphics. If you're running a commercial Web site, you should have sufficient investment to create graphics that reinforce your company's brand.

48 **"Whether it's games, graphics, animation or film – study and understand the detail about the designs you love. They'll inspire you to create new and better things."**
David Streeke, Deepend

Catering core

49 As well as thinking about your audience, you need to think about what platforms your visitors will use to access your site. You'll need to test your site on at least a PC and a Mac.

Check mate

50 Check your HTML with an analyser. Doctor HTML (**www2.imagiware.com/RxHTML**) examines your HTML and reports any problems to you. Dr. Watson (**www.addy.com/watson**) performs a similar job. Software analysers are better if you've got a lot of pages to check. You'll find more HTML validation tools at **www.weblint.org/validation.html**

Spot the missing link

51 The Web was built around authors making links to other useful Web sites. But if you carry links on your Web site, make sure you check them regularly to see if they're still working. Mutual linking to sites is great, but don't link to sites that are unrelated to your business.

52 **"Find out which universities provide the best courses to equip a new media designer."**
David Streeke, Deepend

Men at work

53 If a site isn't finished, don't post it on the Web. All good sites are under construction behind the scenes.

54 **"Try as you might, you won't find further details of this feature in your manual."**
Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com

Hide and seek

55 The chances of anyone finding your site is small unless you get listed with the main search engines. The likes of Lycos (**www.lycos.co.uk**) and AltaVista (**www.altavista.co.uk**) crawl the Web to find new sites and update pages in their database. They read META tags and keywords on your home page – make sure these describe your content.

56 **"Learn to see everything."**
Neale Hall, SP New Media

Let them do the hard work

57 Browsers like contributing to Web sites, so make sure you have a discussion board. It'll encourage visitors to return to your site and help you expand your content.

Testing times

58 You'll need to carry out usability tests before your site goes live. Design your site with the latest software, but don't forget about people who don't have the latest Web browsers. Test all your links and navigation toolbars before uploading your site.

59 **"Show your site to people before it goes live – they can tell you if it's easy to use."**
Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA

Fold here

60 You should never have more than one animation above the fold on a Web page – it's just plain annoying.

61 **"Bevelled buttons are not cool!" Mike Slocombe, Urban 75**

Get organised

62 Think about the organisation of your site before you start creating lots of new pages. Decide where you want your visitors to go and then design your navigation system.

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Building your business connections **www.netkonect.net**

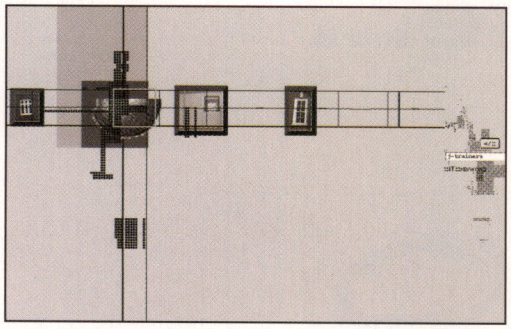
63 WHICH SITE WOULD YOU HOLD UP TO YOUR DESIGN TEAM AS A BAD EXAMPLE OF A WEB DESIGNER'S ART?

"None, we tend to focus on the positive" **Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA**

www.boo.com "It's a pretty site until you realise it takes an hour to find a T-shirt. You're not quite sure what's going on, and it cuts out certain platforms." **Neale Hall, SP New Media**

www.miniheroes.co.uk "For a site that's meant to be fun and appealing, this probably has the most unattractive and confusing home page of any site I've seen recently. **David Streeke, Deepend**

www.saturn.com "Hold me back." **Margaret Manning, Reading Room**



Sophie Greenfield is right to condemn this site (www.e13.com). The opening page takes too long to load, there's nothing to tell you about the site and the 'links' crash the page on a Mac

"The bad ones aren't really done by designers, are they? Or are they?" **Richard Beaumount, flg21**

www.boo.com "It promises so much and delivers so little – it's full of clutter, confusion and dead ends." **Guy Timewell, pres.co**

www.boo.com "I think boo.com has probably set us back two years. It's everything that clients fear from creatives. It's self-indulgent and ignores the customer's needs." **Derek Scanlon, iXL**

www.e13.com "It's so bad it's funny." **Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com**

www.sony.com "If you're looking for a crap commercial site, this takes some beating – you can turn grey waiting for some of the pages to download and you soon get lost in its 'funky' navigation. **Mike Slocombe, Urban 75**

Boo.com is a big disappointment considering the time it took to develop and the investment and promotion behind the site. The design is far too complicated and unwieldy for an online store

Space-aged

64 Think about space. Don't try to pack your pages with images, text and unnecessary animated GIFs. The Web's a cluttered place. If you have plenty of space on your pages, the design will really stand out.

Size is important

65 To keep your images small, use a program like GIF Wizard (**www.gifwizard.com**), which automatically compresses them for you.

Thumbs up

66 If you have to put large images on your Web sites, use thumbnails (small versions of your graphics) so your visitors don't have to waste their phone bills downloading large images that they didn't want to see.

Size it up

67 Always specify the size attributes of your images. You can state this in the IMG tag. This'll make your pages smoother, because the browser can build pages on the screen even before it's downloaded the image.

68 **"Laugh out loud at least once a day, take criticism well and don't be too precious."**
Julian Jordan, Fish

Register here

69 You'll need to find out who's looking at your site and what they're looking at. Asking your visitors to register before using the site is risky because it puts a lot of people off. A different way to gain useful marketing information is to run competitions or offer a cash incentive for filling in forms.

Make your site interactive

70 Give your visitor tools to answer questions, get information and organise their lives.

Picture perfect

71 Change the pictures on your site as often as you can. The images on the main page of the Channel 4 site (**www.channel4.com**) change on a daily basis. People prefer to click on pictures than text links.

Game on

72 Games make good interactive content and they're a good way of getting people to revisit your site. MyVal (**www.myval.com**) offers a range of games for free.

Take your pick

73 Choose you Web authoring software carefully. Make sure you're getting the best software for your budget. Check our reviews of the best Net products every month.

Keep up to date

74 Use the latest version of your Web design package. You should be entitled to cheap upgrades or, in some cases, free updates. The large packages, such as Dreamweaver (**www.macromedia.com/dreamweaver**) and FrontPage (**www.microsoft.com/frontpage**), are being improved all the time. im

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR DREAM BIT OF WEB DESIGN KIT AND WHAT WOULD IT DO?

"More sophisticated personalisation software." **Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA**

"A client filter plug-in for Photoshop, which you could apply once you're completely happy with your design." **Neale Hall, SP New Media**

"A piece of software that would analyse a site and automatically correct all the client's last minute changes that 'shouldn't take that long to do!'." **David Streeke, Deepend**

"Compression software that would let multimedia download in a fraction of the the time it takes now." **Margaret Manning, Reading Room**

"Something that writes code and works in all browsers and on all platforms without ever needing to be tested." **Julian Jordan, Fish**

"Photoshop documents that code and carve themselves up and look the way you intended them to." **Richard Beaumount, flg21**

"A great assistant." **Derek Scanlon, iXL**

"A printable white board and an OS that responds to telepathic input or retinal tracking. Magic, plug-in free software that could calibrate a designer's monitor, browser settings and delivery speed to the customer and client viewers." **Sophie Greenfield, Agency.com**

"A WYSIWYG program that dishes out perfect code and compressed graphics to within an inch of their lives, leaving me with enough time to go out partying all night." **Mike Slocombe, Urban 75**

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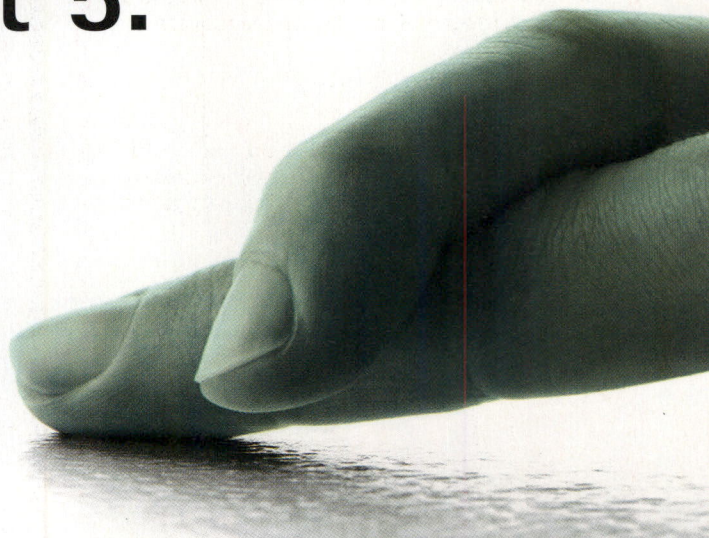

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WALKING WITH DINOSAURS

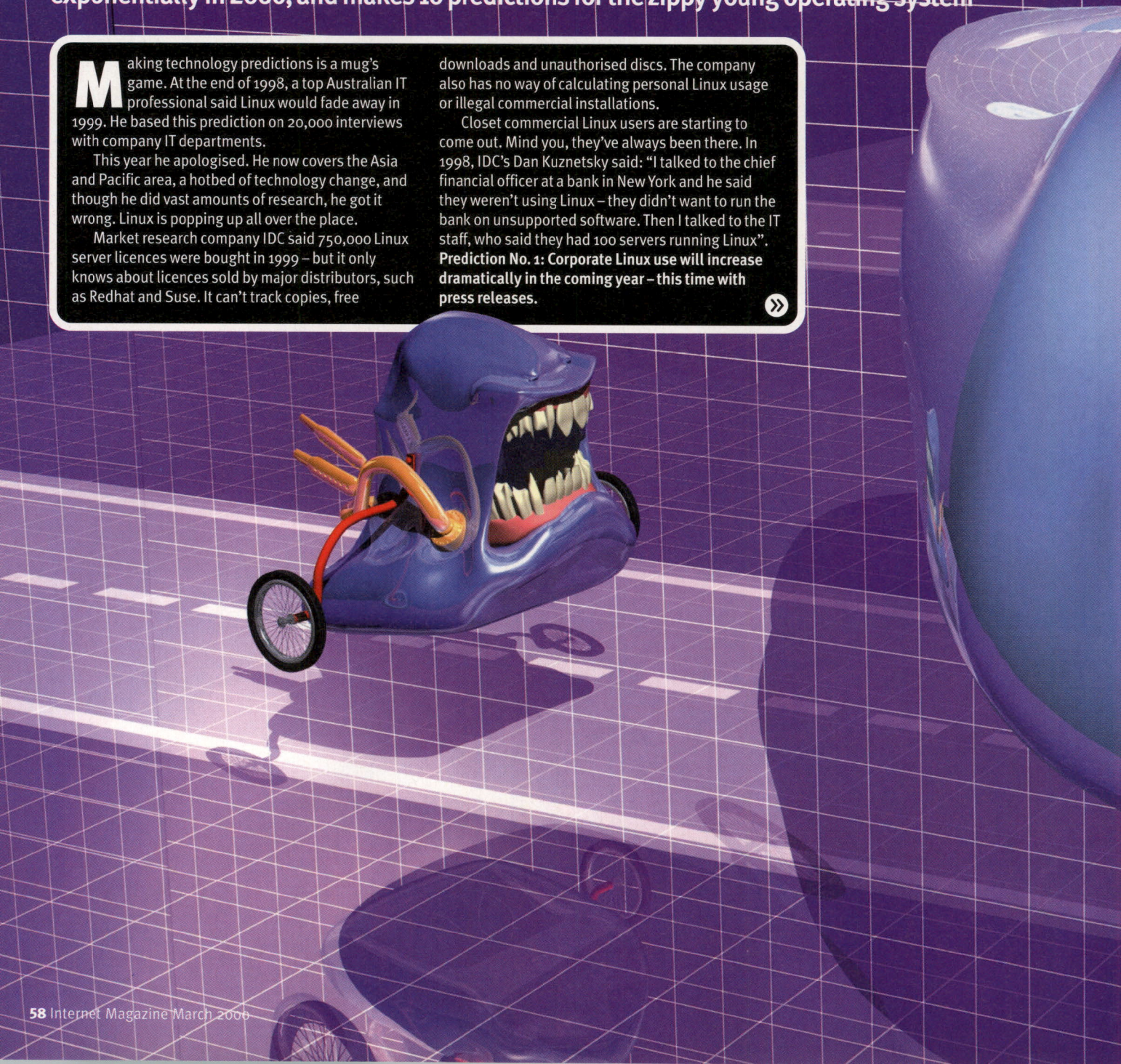
Linux makes its code freely available to everyone, in contrast to the secrecy and price of Microsoft's monolithic and lumbering Windows platform. Steve Patient says Linux will grow exponentially in 2000, and makes 10 predictions for the zippy young operating system

Making technology predictions is a mug's game. At the end of 1998, a top Australian IT professional said Linux would fade away in 1999. He based this prediction on 20,000 interviews with company IT departments.

This year he apologised. He now covers the Asia and Pacific area, a hotbed of technology change, and though he did vast amounts of research, he got it wrong. Linux is popping up all over the place.

Market research company IDC said 750,000 Linux server licences were bought in 1999 – but it only knows about licences sold by major distributors, such as Redhat and Suse. It can't track copies, free downloads and unauthorised discs. The company also has no way of calculating personal Linux usage or illegal commercial installations.

Closet commercial Linux users are starting to come out. Mind you, they've always been there. In 1998, IDC's Dan Kuznetsky said: "I talked to the chief financial officer at a bank in New York and he said they weren't using Linux – they didn't want to run the bank on unsupported software. Then I talked to the IT staff, who said they had 100 servers running Linux". **Prediction No. 1: Corporate Linux use will increase dramatically in the coming year – this time with press releases.**



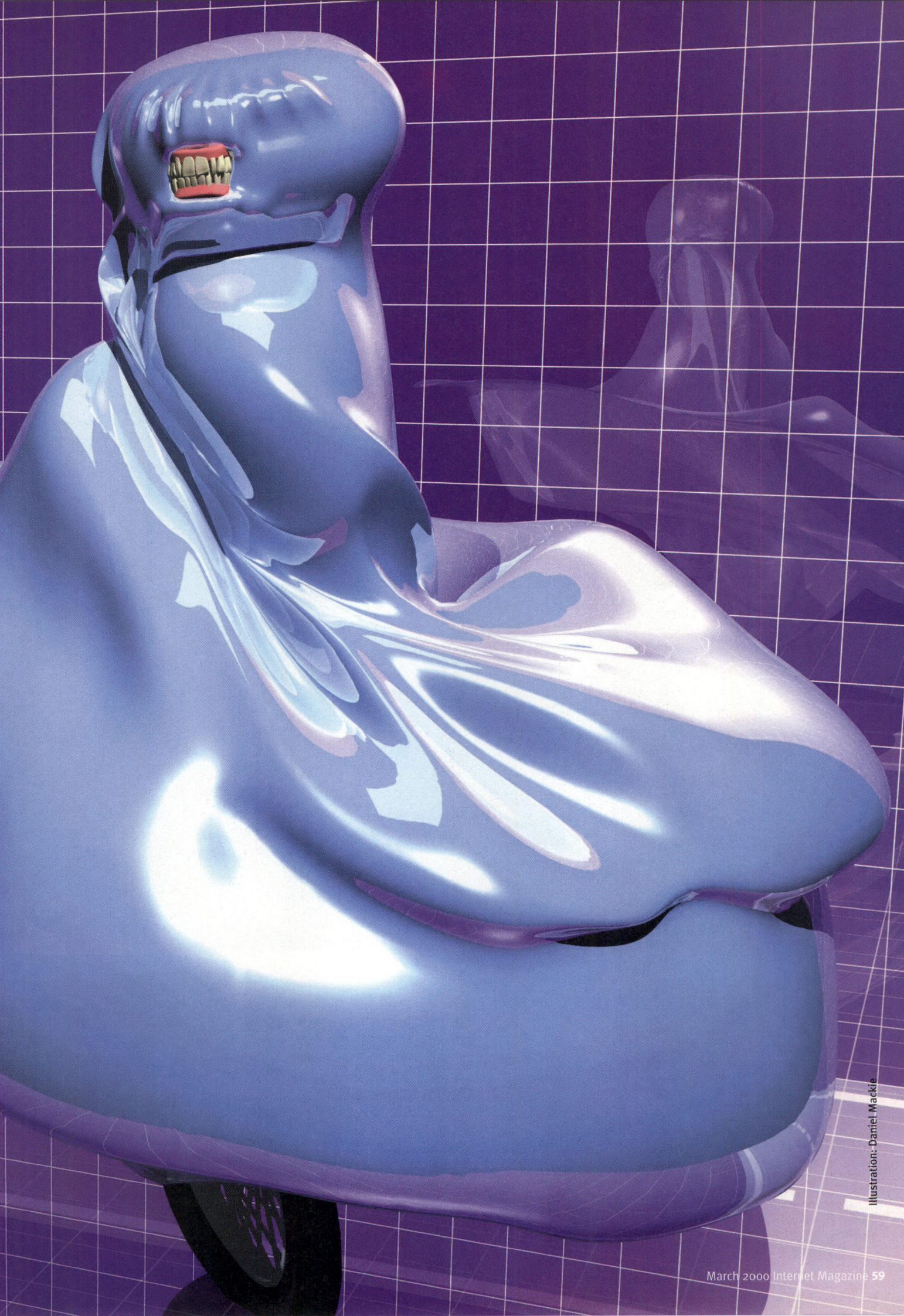


Illustration: Daniel Mackie

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Source: Internet Magazine, October 1999. Prices exclude VAT@ 17.5%. Accounts include UK domain registration only.
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MISTRAL

The new facts of life

Most technical staff don't tell the management anything that might confuse them. They ignore instructions to increase the flexibility of their IT budget and network reliability. They know about the Linux platform – their management doesn't.

Managers need to learn the new facts of life. The Internet runs on open source software – just under 30 per cent of Net servers run Linux, more than 50 per cent run Apache, and almost all Unix and Linux servers run Sendmail. Companies rely on unsupported software for the Net itself – and they're beginning to realise that it works.

Estimates of the number of desktop Linux users vary from around seven million to 15 million, but figures for places such as China and most third-world countries are only estimates.

For poorer countries, a mature and reliable open source operating system – with plenty of open source applications – is a much better option than an expensive closed OS that requires the latest PC hardware before it'll get out of bed in the morning.

Linux lets poorer countries clamp down on counterfeit software without incurring internal economic penalties. As a result, the country gains respectability and saves money. Everyone's a winner.

Prediction Number No. 2: Third-world Linux use will increase dramatically in the coming year.

A world phenomenon

Linux is a global volunteer project involving almost all nationalities with Net access. It creates its effects from the bottom up rather than the commercial, top-down direction.

From individuals to organisations and companies to countries, people are choosing to use, develop and support Linux for their own reasons, not those of a marketing machine.

In Japan, Linux has become the fastest selling retail OS ever. In Canada, Corel is betting the company on it. The Mexican government saved $124 million by using Redhat Linux as the operating system on its school computers, which meant it could buy far more computers for the children. In contrast, the Windows licence is one of the most expensive components of a new PC. Lose Windows and you can make big gains.

Young programmers and IT staff have been exposed to Linux at university because it's open source – they can't learn much from closed software like Windows. The current generation of IT graduates is taking Linux into industry and government. They know the platform, they can customise it, add to it and adapt it to the problems confronting them. In the coming year, Linux will crop up in any computing area where technical staff on a limited budget and are allowed to make choices.

Prediction No. 3: Linux will begin to appear on IT procurement documents as the preferred option – and win.

A commercial reality

IBM is committed to supporting Linux on its entire range of hardware. To meet increasing demand, the company's also made a lot of its software Linux-compatible.

IBM's hated Microsoft since it trashed their joint OS/2 project. If you're a corporate, you can use Windows – which will cost you a fortune – or Linux for next to nothing. You can also check the quality of the code with Linux.

Sun Microsystems now admits that Linux is already as popular as Solaris, and like all other Unix hardware vendors, it's having to offer Linux on its hardware – along with companies such as Hewlett Packard, SGI and Compaq, and even desktop PC sellers like Dell and Gateway.

These companies don't really want to offer Unix. Their Unix sales are major revenue earners. But their customers are demanding Linux.

Prediction No. 4: Linux will start to replace Unix on workstations. Next year it'll be capable of running the kind of Unix boxes banks rely on. Linux will lead to calls for independent code quality checks as part of buying software.

Linux 2000

Ethernet inventor and full-time pundit Bob Metcalfe has been sniping at Linux since it first began to appear in the consumer computer press. He says Windows 2000 will kill Linux.

Metcalfe likens the ideology of Linux (an open source platform) to communism, and claims it'll collapse in the same way. But he also said the Net would collapse in 1996, and he had to eat his words when it didn't.

Even if Microsoft gave Windows 2000 away free, along with the source code, it still wouldn't kill Linux. The platform has nothing to prove. Thousands of volunteer developers do it for fun and glory, but they also do it so they can't be locked into a marketing machine.

Windows 2000 is three years late and it still doesn't have all its parts in place. Linux, being modular and layered rather than monolithic, can't run late. It's not a commercial product – it evolves.

Prediction No.5: There'll be a groundswell of demand for Linux as people start to understand that the 'free' in free software means personal freedom, as in free speech.

Use it or don't. Who cares?

Most of the Linux community doesn't care whether you use Linux or not. But it's justly proud of Linux and wants you to know the truth about it.

Open source encourages truth and transparency. Despite a lot of rubbish from the likes of Microsoft, which sees Linux as a threat, more individuals and organisations are adopting the platform – the truth really does set you free.

People who use Linux get positive feedback about its results from those they respect. It solves their problems,

LINUX PROFITS

The licence that accompanies free GNU software (the GPL) specifically forbids concealing or owning source code, which means it's hard to see how anyone can ever corner the market in Linux distributions or software applications.

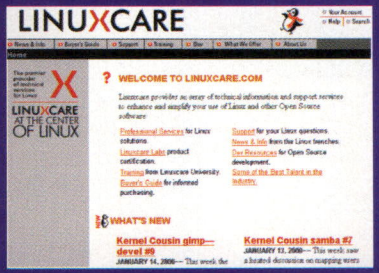
Any software that uses GPL code automatically becomes GPL software. Profit will come from consultancy, creating better distributions, servicing niche markets, supporting Linux users and converting quality commercial software. The costs won't be high because there will be genuine, open competition. Linux will usher in an era of cheaper and more reliable computing.

LINUX HARDWARE

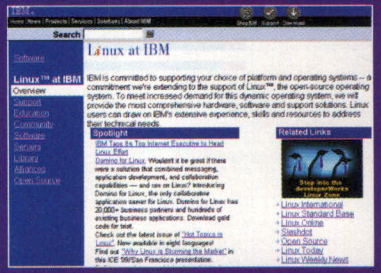
When Logitech announced it would support Linux drivers for its hardware it was responding to the market, not leading it. Many of the most aggressive, knowledgeable and committed PC hardware enthusiasts are Linux users. This is an important endorsement.

In the coming year, you can expect to see more peripherals released with Linux drivers and more hardware interfaces published for people who are willing to write such drivers. You'll also see 'Linux Compatible' appearing on retail boxes, and 'Linux Inside' stickers on a variety of hardware devices.

Worries over a dearth of software for the new operating system are likely to be short-lived. As Mac has seen recently, popularity soon gets software houses moving



Linux support is now widely available from hardware vendors, software vendors and independent third-party support companies, such as Linuxcare (www.linuxcare.com)



In 1999, IBM (www.ibm.com) decided to throw its colossal weight behind Linux. In 2000, you can expect to see accelerated Linux use at the expense of Unix and NT

LINUX DEVELOPMENT

Linux users probably have more development tools and languages than those on any other platform. These run all the way from Richard Stallman's original GNU project to MetroWerks' CodeWarrior (www.metroworks.com).

Linux programmers swap ideas and code, which leads to more robust software – commercial programmers have to sign non-disclosure agreements, which leads to poor coding and bugs. You can expect to see more commercial software companies announcing support for open source projects in 2000 to gain more credibility for their closed code products.

LINUX LEISURE

Loki (www.lokigames.com) was one of the first gaming houses to make Linux ports available. Linux users are surprisingly game-oriented. The Linux Game Tome (http://happypenguin.org) lists around 130 games.

You can also use Linux to capture video, connect to around 900 digital cameras, and create and edit Web pages. You can play audio CDs, MPEG movies and DVD discs, and edit and create music, just as you would on any other platform. Graphics are particularly well represented. GIMP (www.gimp.com) is like an infinitely extensible Photoshop workalike, which is the jewel in the crown.

they don't have to worry about licence issues, they can adapt it to run anything from a video editing suite to an elevator (it's already doing both). No one puts pressure on them. A great example is Powys County Council. In February 1999, the council's IT spokesperson, Tim Fletcher, said switching to open source software cut the cost of providing public email and Web access by 90 per cent.

Prediction No. 6: With the prospect of massive potential savings, the use of Linux will dramatically increase in the public sector this year.

Upgrade hell

How much money does Microsoft spend every year persuading you to upgrade Windows software, despite a user base of 100 million people? The manufacturers of closed software make nothing from an installed base – they sell or die. So does this encourage them to produce quality, bug-free software? Absolutely not. Microsoft is said to have changed file formats in application software to make it difficult for companies not to upgrade.

Linux authors change things, but they only do it to improve software. The file formats are open, source code is supplied, and you decide whether to upgrade or not. Either way, it won't cost you anything.

Stepping off the expensive software upgrade treadmill provides a major reason for companies to move to Linux on the desktop. It can't happen any other way. Where's the risk? The Linux community can't become bankrupt, it can't be driven out of business or miss goals or shipped units; it can't die from a lack of investment and it can't make poor product development decisions.

Prediction No. 7: Linux will appear on more desktops this year as people realise they own it and can make decisions for their own benefit, not someone else's.

Software sales

Competition is moving the Net towards free access. Microsoft's hegemony is based on Office more than Windows, which is why it's looking at a software rental service to smooth its cashflow.

The high profile of Linux in the media has come from the efforts of people who want to use it as their desktop OS. Linux developers know a good idea when they steal one. They've incorporated the GUI lessons that have been learnt over the last decade to build the KDE and Gnome desktop environments.

But Linux developers realise that an office suite is essential if Linux is to cut it as a serious alternative to existing platforms, and they're working on it.

While MS Office is effective, its feature set is indistinguishable from the commercial competitors it squashed beneath marketing wheels. The competition is now rising from the dead to haunt it.

Prediction No. 8: Linux will seriously impact on commercial software sales and prices this year.

Revenge is sweet

You can already get free, but full-strength, applications such as WordPerfect 8 and StarOffice, for Linux. Both of these applications have a high degree of file compatibility with MS Office. Even Microsoft's rental model is in danger. Sun can do it better, and for less, with StarOffice and Linux.

More frightening for Microsoft, and others, is the server side battle. Microsoft might win the commercial server OS war, but find they've lost the customers they were fighting for.

Microsoft is hoping to win big with its features on Windows 2000. Its Journaling File Systems (JFS) let you perform a complete data recovery in the event of a system crash. Linux didn't have one, so Silicon Graphics donated its JFS to the GNU (a project aimed at developing a completely free software environment).

Prediction No. 9: There will be an accelerated improvement in Linux's features set, as companies choose to release great software and services to the Linux community.

The end user

While more people will be using Linux on their desktop PCs, you're more likely to see this at work than at home. Home use of Linux will grow fastest in Net appliances rather than on your desktop.

Prediction No. 10: Linux will become the embedded OS of choice for a wide range of domestic and commercial appliances.

Summary

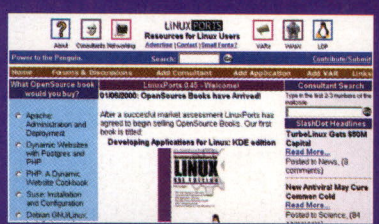
Linux will continue to evolve and grow across a user base of individuals, organisations, companies and countries. With the increased respectability that comes from being used by business, this growth can only accelerate the use of this platform around the world.

Red Hat has already offered Linux free to schools in the UK, and IBM has announced its intention to make Linux the centre of its hardware plans. The government of China has dropped the Windows platform to adopt Linux in all its government departments, which could have significant repercussions for the rest of the country.

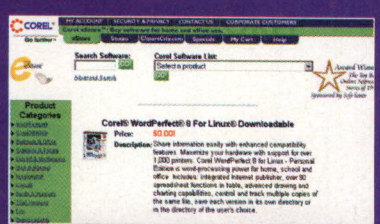
Perhaps most significant of all, shares of VA Linux systems – which makes computers and servers running the operating system – gained almost 700 per cent when it was floated on the Nasdaq high-tech market in December 1999. im

LINUX LINKS

Hardware compatibility, distribution links and lots more
www.linux.org
Operating system use by domain
www.leb.net/hzo/ioscount/index.html
Linux Gaming
happypenguin.org
www.linuxgames.com
Linux and other Open Source software
www.gnu.org
www.davecentral.com
Linux consultants (worldwide)
www.linuxports.com
Linux magazines
www2.linuxjournal.com
www.linuxnow.com
www.freshmeat.com
www.slashdot.com
Linux documentation
http://metalab.unc.edu/mdw/index.html
Linux mailing lists
http://oslab.snu.ac.kr/~djshin/linux/mail-list/index.shtml
Linux newsgroups
http://home.ins.de/~m.hussmann/linux.html



Linuxports links to independent Linux consultants operating in most of the countries of the world. A consultant explosion is a sure sign of success



Corel (www.corel.com) has realised it can't fight Microsoft on its own ground, so it's taking it on with software Microsoft can't embrace and extend

INSTEAD OF BLOWING OUR OWN TRUMPET WE THOUGHT WE'D LET THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA BLOW IT FOR US.

Using Actinic Catalog e-commerce software in harmony with professional design, hosting and payment services, the LSO drummed up thousands of pounds worth of extra sales online. From setting up a single web store to a complete e-commerce portal, Actinic partners – designers, web hosts, VARs and ISPs – deliver e-commerce solutions easily and cost-effectively. If that comes as music to your ears, contact us for a full information pack. See **www.actinic.co.uk** or call **01932 860524.**

ACTINICe-asy to do business with.

France

It can be easy to forget that there are great sites out there that aren't from the UK or the US. Tanya Kreisky takes a moment to salute the best online offerings from the neighbour we love to hate

The French wrote the book on *la vie en rose* and gave the world crème brûlée and camembert, de Beauvoir and Debussy, the Tour de France and the Tour Eiffel. They have a wonderful reputation for style, romance, cuisine and culture.

France has a population of around 57.7 million in an area of 551,000 km^2, about the same number of people as the UK, but living in around twice the space.

Thanks to the successful Minitel service that has linked France for years, and the dominance of the English language online, take-up of the Internet has been sluggish to say the least. But take a quick trawl around the Net, and you'll soon see that French sites have plenty to offer.

So forget about lorry blockades and hysterical farmers for a moment, and enjoy an online tour.

General Information

CIA Factfile
A summary of French geography, economy, government, communications and transport facts. Start here if you're not even sure where France is.
www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fr.html

France.com
A packed guide to the country for all us English folk. Take part in French auctions, get the French news in audio or video, and ramble through its huge collection of links.
www.france.com

Virtual France
A handy list of link to French businesses and organisations online.
www.1-call.co.uk/webcentral/france.html

Le Monde Interactif
It'll tax your knowledge of the French language, but this is an excellent, information-packed site.
www.lemonde.fr

Getting there

The France Holiday Store
All manner of French holiday services on one site – a good place to start planning.
www.fr-holidaystore.co.uk/index1

Hoverspeed
Getting across the Channel's a good start, and here's the fastest seafaring option.
www.hoverspeed.co.uk

P&O Ferries
Cross channel ferry timetables, prices, special offers and online booking.
www.poef.com/poef/index.htm

Seafrance
Some bargains, online prices, schedules and bookings.
www.seafrance.com

Eurostar
Why not let the train take the strain? Check out the special offers and package deals for a romantic weekend in Paris.
www.eurostar.com

Ryanair
The low cost airlines have some great deals on flights to France. Destinations include St Etienne, Carcassonne and Biarritz.
www.ryanair.ie

Buzz
Latest arrival on the low-cost scene offers flights to Toulouse, Paris, Lyon, Bordeaux, Montpellier and Marseilles.
www.buzzaway.com

Rough Guides
Top tips on what to see, where to stay and how to avoid a few social *faux pas*.
http://travel.roughguides.com/content/1830/index.htm

Food

Fromages.com
Express delivery of fine French cheeses. Pick and choose your own cheeseboard. There are also recipes, articles, a cheese encyclopedia, and even a cheese club.
www.fromages.com

Mustard
Fine mustard from Dijon. You probably never knew there were so many mustard facts. And if you're tired of the cheese club, you can join the mustard club.
www.moutarde.com

France Art de Vivre
Regional cuisine, traditional cooking and online shopping. Sadly the translations don't appeal – choose from fatty duck, pig in salting or 'rabitt'.
www.artdevivre-france.com

Cordon Bleu
And if you want to learn the higher art of French cuisine, sign up for a course with one of the Cordon Bleu cooking schools.
http://cordonbleu.net

The Truffle
The world's first online truffle market . Find out all about the delicacy, and if you're feeling flush you can even order some.
www.truffe-perigord-noir.com

Drink

Mumm Champagne
It's a 24-hour party at this site. Learn about the making of Mumm, its history and catch up on the latest Mumm news.
www.champagne-mumm.com

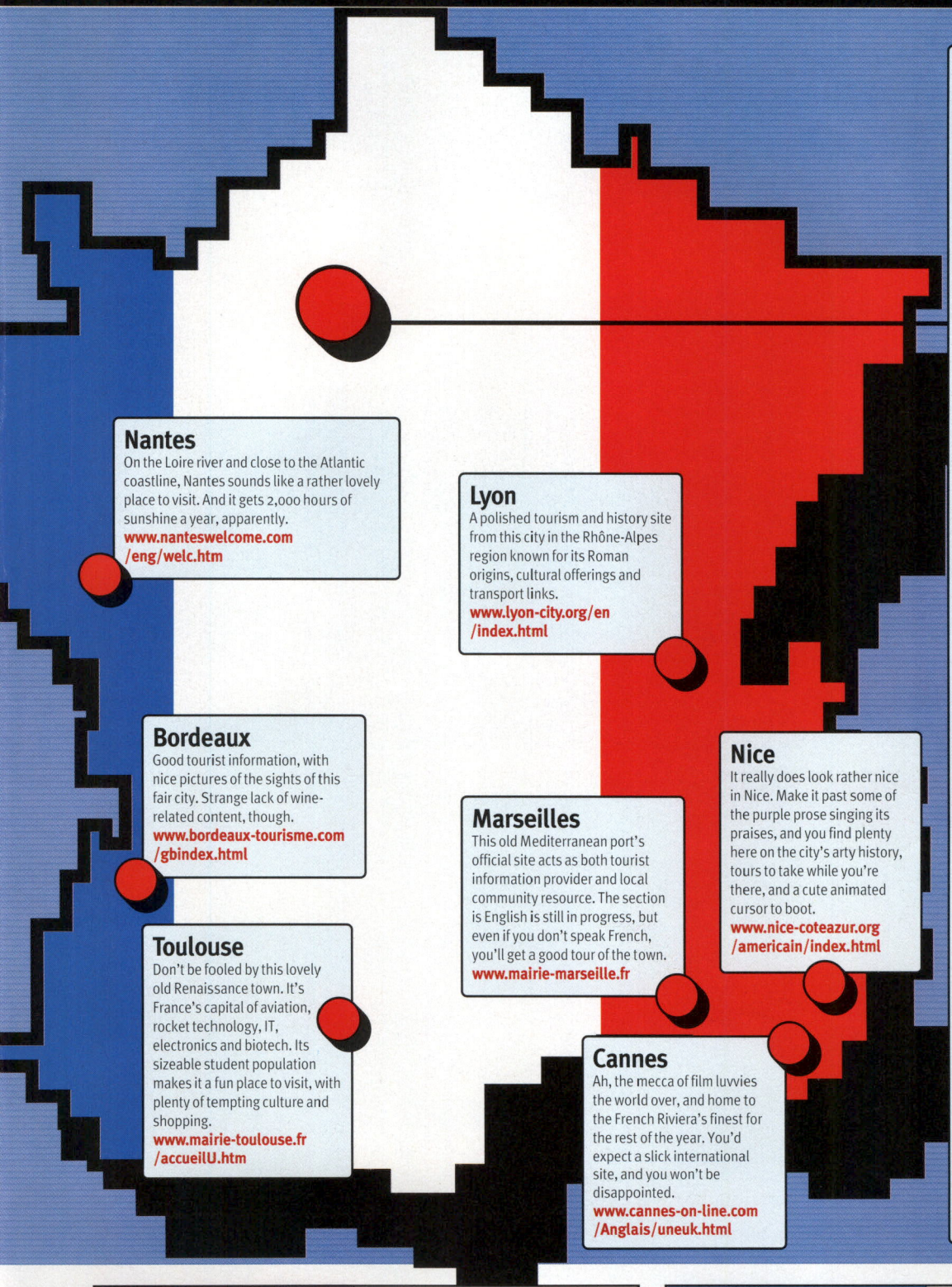
Veuve Clicquot
Tour the cellars, comment on the vintages and see what you can score in the quiz.
www.veuve-clicquot.fr

Chateau Online
Order French wines and champagne online for rapid delivery.
www.chateauonline.com

French Wine Web
If you're feeling adventurous, you can order lesser-known French wines here. It claims to offer 'top grade French wines at very favourable conditions".
www.french-wine-web.com

Armagnac Yves Duflo
If spirits are more your style, find out all about Armagnac at Monsieur Duflo's site.
www.gascony.com/Duflo

Kronenbourg 1664
An English site for the French beer. Worth a visit for its selection of cheesy chatup lines translated into French.
www.kronenbourg1664.co.uk



Nantes

On the Loire river and close to the Atlantic coastline, Nantes sounds like a rather lovely place to visit. And it gets 2,000 hours of sunshine a year, apparently.

www.nanteswelcome.com /eng/welc.htm

Lyon

A polished tourism and history site from this city in the Rhône-Alpes region known for its Roman origins, cultural offerings and transport links.

www.lyon-city.org/en /index.html

Bordeaux

Good tourist information, with nice pictures of the sights of this fair city. Strange lack of wine-related content, though.

www.bordeaux-tourisme.com /gbindex.html

Nice

It really does look rather nice in Nice. Make it past some of the purple prose singing its praises, and you find plenty here on the city's arty history, tours to take while you're there, and a cute animated cursor to boot.

www.nice-coteazur.org /americain/index.html

Marseilles

This old Mediterranean port's official site acts as both tourist information provider and local community resource. The section is English is still in progress, but even if you don't speak French, you'll get a good tour of the town.

www.mairie-marseille.fr

Toulouse

Don't be fooled by this lovely old Renaissance town. It's France's capital of aviation, rocket technology, IT, electronics and biotech. Its sizeable student population makes it a fun place to visit, with plenty of tempting culture and shopping.

www.mairie-toulouse.fr /accueilU.htm

Cannes

Ah, the mecca of film luvvies the world over, and home to the French Riviera's finest for the rest of the year. You'd expect a slick international site, and you won't be disappointed.

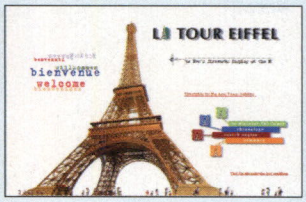
www.cannes-on-line.com /Anglais/uneuk.html

Paris

The Eiffel Tower

An official site covering the building of the tower and offering you a tour. You'll also find some great photography and get the chance to watch those amazing New Year fireworks again.

www.tour-eiffel.fr/indexuk.html



The Louvre

As you'd expect, a well designed site. Take a virtual tour, book tickets, learn about the collection and visit the museum shop online.

www.louvre.fr

Musée D'Orsay

Another nice-looking site, if a bit slow. The D'Orsay is a converted train station, and holds an amazing collection of Impressionist art. Again, you can find out about exhibits and shop online.

www.musee-orsay.fr

Château de Versailles

An excellent virtual tour of the palace and gardens, with quality still photographs and 360° pictures too.

www.smartweb.fr/versailles

Time Out

Time Out publishes guides to shopping, eating, and staying in Paris, and you can get most of the material online. The restaurant recommendations are particularly good.

www.timeout.com

Paris Tourism

Plenty of handy information including a hit list of places to visit, maps, museum guides, recommended hotels and city tours.

www.paris-tourism.com

Sport

Tour de France

The country's most famous sporting event has an excellent official site. Look out for Le Tour 2000 content as the race approaches.

www.letour.com

Le Mans

Almost as famous is the French contribution to world motorsport. This is a good-looking official site for the 24-hour race.

www.24h-le-mans.com

Football

A site dedicated to the exploits of the fairly successful French national side. Results, fixtures, history and a lot of stuff about the World Cup.

www.allezfrance.org/e/france.html

Ski France

Sort out a skiing trip to France here. Check out the slopes on the Webcams, search for accommodation, keep an eye the weather and request lots of shiny brochures.

www.skifrance.fr

Boules

Or petanque as it's sometimes called. Check on the sport's rules, championship standings and history. You can even plan a visit to the National Boules Museum.

www.multimania.com/petanque

Odds & ends

The Religion Store

Religious goods from Lourdes. Order your holy water, rosaries, bracelets and key rings here. Sadly no miracle cures to order.

www.religion-store.com

The Breton Shirt Company

For that French stereotype look, buy yourself a traditional stripy top. Now all you need is a bicycle and some onions...

www.centreone.co.uk/breton.html

French Property News

A little place in France... what could be better. If you're serious about a second home check this out.

www.french-property-news.com

TAM-Beret

OK, so it's miles from France, but it's beret heaven. "Design your own look, and make a Fashion Statement when you sport your monogrammed beret uptown, and downtown!!" I'll take 10.

https://storefront.impressa.com /Renaissance/LiveClients /tamberet_new

Chanel

Rather more upmarket are the parfums and couture at this famous fashion house.

www.chanel.com

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net start

Netstart is the flexible approach to a business Internet solution. What we mean by flexible is that this account works equally well for both single computer accessing the Internet via an analogue modem or a whole company with hundreds of employees using an Internet server solution connected via 128K ISDN. Whether you are a small or large business, netstart is the solution to your Internet needs as you simply configure and manage your account using an online interface. Whatever your Internet needs are, netstart will grow with your ever expanding business needs. All for the low cost of £9.99+VAT!

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- **CGI server allowing you to create and run your own scripts**
- **Unix based shell server with standard tools**
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- **Search engine submission tool**
- **Web based e-mail**
- **Static IP address**
- **Unlimited Pop3 e-mail addresses or SMTP e-mail**
- **Fax-2-email, a unique fax number allowing you to receive faxes as e-mail**
- **Support for Standard modems , K56flex, X2, V.90 and ISDN up to 128k**
- **Connection at local call rates**
- **Free technical support available 7 days a week**

net complete

Any company wishing to connect their network to the Internet ought to consider the benefits of having a dedicated and exclusive 'fast path to the Net' permanently connected with a leased line. Advantages are maximum data throughput speeds, 24hr Internet presence and availability and fixed manageable costs. Plusnet will arrange for a dedicated telecom circuit to be installed, this line will be connected to your company's computer network and our Internet network via a router or using the NetPilot Internet Branch Exchange below. The speed of your connection can be upgraded on a modular basis as your requirements grow. A dedicated and direct connection truly empowers your business to capitalise on e-commerce and e-business opportunities. Selling and communicating across the Internet truly is the way forward and with netcomplete your business will be able to really "Work the Internet." At these prices it really is low cost to get a permanent connection!

Capacity	Installation Cost*	London Annual Rental*	Within 50K of Major City*
64K	£500	£3,795.25	£3,795.25
128K	£1,500	£6,645.25	£8,545.25
256K	£1,500	£9,495.25	£11,395.25
2MB	£6,100	£21,845.25	£28,495.25

net pilot

Need to put more than one of your companies computer online? Well Internet access is unbelievably easy and controllable with netpilot. It's an integrated, fit-and-forget Internet Branch Exchange, providing everything you'll ever need for secure company-wide email and web browsing in a single box. All PC users connected to your LAN can be given controlled Internet access. You just need a netsart account and an ISDN line while netpilot provides the rest. purchase a netpilot for the low cost of £1495+VAT and get your LAN connected to the Internet!

You won't worry about phone bills going through the roof. You'll be sure that no-one wastes time looking at inappropriate web sites. Installation and management is quick and simple - whether you have a handful of users or hundreds. You don't even need any IT expertise.

The difficult problem of network security has been tackled, too. NetPilot's built-in firewall has been accredited by Checkmark, an independent testing and standards organisation, which found that it equals the security of firewalls from specialist vendors.

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e-mail: business-sales@plus.net.uk
Web: http://www.plus.net.uk

Insight

Plusnet is part of the Insight Group
www.insight.com

*Prices subject to survey

All work and No play

Do you use your work email to send personal messages to friends, or browse the Internet for non work-related matters? Gail Robinson says employers are now capable of finding out how long you're spending on the Web, which sites you're looking at and who you're addressing your emails to. Scary stuff, eh?

A large US computer company recently gave one of its managers an official warning for sending romantic emails to his wife from his office computer. Here in the UK, a woman was sacked for using the corporate Internet connection during her lunch break to find a bargain holiday. These are scary facts, bearing in mind most people with a Net connection at work have committed both of these 'crimes'. You have, no doubt, sent your fair share of personal emails through the office computers and browsed the news, entertainment and even job Web sites when you think the boss isn't looking. But you never think you'll get the sack for this behaviour – surely it's all perfectly innocent?

Well, that's what you'd think, but in a recent spate of cases, the misuse of Internet resources at work has led to official warnings and, in some cases, dismissal. Some of these acts of discipline seem justified. At the Oxfordshire-based Atomic Energy Authority, eight nuclear scientists were forced to resign when they were caught using office computers to look at pornography on the Internet. Rolls Royce suspended 14 people and sacked five who were caught sending porn around the corporate network. Meanwhile, in the US, Xerox sacked 40 members of staff for looking at porn on the Internet during work hours. Xerox had been using special software to monitor the Internet activities of its 90,000 staff and discovered people were spending a lot of time on Web sites that had nothing to do with photocopiers. Even the Houses of Parliament have suffered, with claims that their computer systems have been used to view porn sites online.

Cases involving online pornography seem pretty clear cut – you're out on your ear if you get caught. For most companies, this will be a case of gross misconduct. But there are other examples where it's hard to know where to draw the line. Flirting at work is commonplace, and sending a few saucy emails is one of the easiest ways to continue a relationship at work without attracting the attention of other colleagues. But what constitutes innocent flirting and what constitutes the distribution of offensive smut is a matter of opinion.

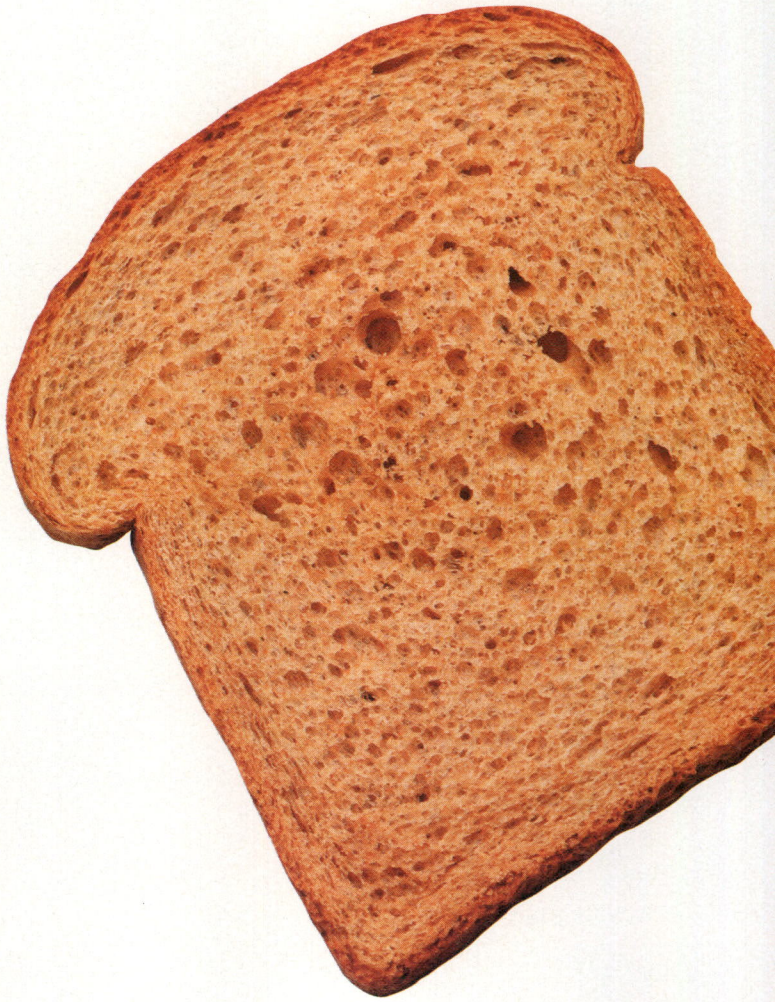
The New York Times erred on the side of smut and sacked 23 employees in December last year for sending what it deemed to be offensive emails. Stories in the American papers suggest the emails contained dirty notes and sexy photographs. Here in the UK, two Kwik-Fit fitters were fired for sending out risqué emails from the company computers. The employees are appealing against their dismissal, claiming Kwik-Fit failed to make its acceptable use of the Internet policy clear.

The most significant case is that of Lois Franxhi, an IT manager who was sacked for using the Internet during her lunch break to track down a bargain holiday. Millions of employees around the UK will be thinking, 'it could easily have been me'. Franxhi claimed she used the Internet for non-work related matters for a total of 111 minutes over four days. She told *The Daily Telegraph*: "It's outrageous and unfair to be sacked for browsing the Web for such a small amount of time." The case went to an industrial tribunal, but Franxhi lost.

The misuse of company computer systems is a growing area of concern for employers. TUC representative Sarah Veal told us this "could be one of the biggest employment rights issues in the next year or two". The Internet is definitely a »

pic: Matt Kenyon

keep your bread



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temptation for employees. You wouldn't expect to get away with making 20 personal phone calls from your desk, but it's easy to send 20 personal emails. Most people now have Internet access from their desktop computers and, unless the boss is looking over your shoulder, they won't be able to tell what you're up to. Veal thinks the new and exciting nature of the Internet appeals: "People who work in word processing jobs are sometimes trapped in a mechanistic way of working, and the temptation is there to have a quick browse on the Net to relieve the boredom."

What's it worth?

Research seems to back up this anecdotal evidence, though it's worth being a bit cynical about some of the research findings. Much of the research on Internet abuse is conducted, or commissioned, by companies that produce software for tracking employees' Net and email activity – so it's safe to assume they have a vested interest in promoting the story. The results are still worrying for employers, though. The Black Box Network Industry Survey revealed that eight million man hours are lost in the UK each year because of people browsing the Net for non-work related tasks.

Then there's the survey of 191 of the largest international companies in the world, which suggests that non-work related Web browsing is costing large businesses £2.5 million a year. According to the same survey, the average employee spends half an hour a day browsing the Internet and some use the Net to look for new jobs – no surprises there, then. More worryingly, half of those who used the Internet in the office looked at pornographic Web sites during work hours. A surprisingly high two in five of the companies surveyed had uncovered a serious incident of improper use of the Internet.

In the US, a survey revealed that 86 per cent of workers used their company email to send and receive personal emails. A whopping 70 per cent of employees said they'd received 'adult-oriented' emails at work. One in 10 employees said they'd received emails containing confidential company information. This last fact is guaranteed to scare the employer – the thought that a business's secrets are floating around in email is guaranteed to send any boss into a fit of hysterics.

What if you're the boss?

The problem for the employer is that, in most cases, they're held responsible for all the information transmitted using their systems. So if you send an email out slagging off a competitor, your employer will be liable as well as you. Many businesses have started to put disclaimers at the end of all emails sent out by their staff. These say something like: "Any views expressed are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of ACME Bigbusiness Corps". Michael Chissick, head of Internet law at Field Fisher Waterhouse, explains that these disclaimers are not foolproof. "The disclaimers added to the end of emails are not legally binding, but it's always good practice to try and disclaim liability," he says.

"The misuse of company computer systems could become one of the biggest employment rights issues."

If your staff have access to the Internet and email at work, you must create a workable policy regarding their use. The TUC's Sarah Veal is convinced the most important thing for employers is to "establish clear rules and not to decide on the spur of the moment that something is or isn't appropriate behaviour". The appeal made by the Kwik-Fit employees shows the dangers of not making your email and Internet policy clear to your employees.

Veal recommends that any policy regarding acceptable use of the Internet should be agreed either with the union or with staff representatives. "No union is going to demand unfettered use of email – they understand employers have the right to control these things. Employers should negotiate some sort of acceptable agreement that's publicised and incorporated into employee's contract," says Veal. It's vital to get these ground rules established and written into the employment contract. This makes it difficult for an employee to claim they didn't know they were doing anything wrong. For tips from the experts on creating a workable acceptable use of the Internet, see the box out above.

We have the technology

You don't have to rely on sneaking up behind your employees – you can use

Writing an acceptable use of the Internet/email policy

We've pulled in the experts to offer you tips on creating a virtually foolproof use of the Internet/email at work policy. Andy Boylan is a security expert at Planet. He's worked together with many clients to formulate acceptable use policies. We've also got advice from the head of Internet law at Field Fisher Waterhouse, Michael Chissick, who's increasingly asked by clients to get involved in this area. Here are a few key areas to think about:

Michael Chissick says you must clearly state the kind of information that must not be sent by email. You should also ban the sending of confidential information or anything that could be considered libellous. Also, make it clear that it's unacceptable to send any kind of pornographic material within email messages. You should also make specific mention of racially offensive material.

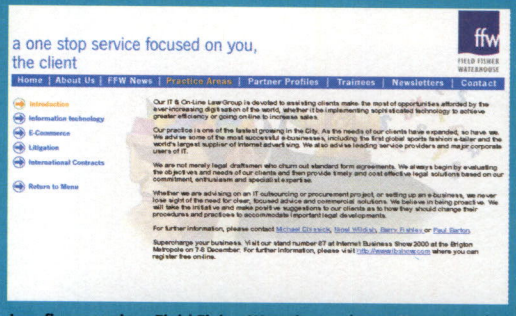
If you wanted to be strict, you could even specify that email isn't to be used for personal communications - only for work-related matters. You could also enforce the same ruling for Web access.

Tell your staff that you're planning to use tracking software to monitor their use of the Internet and email. And if you're planning to look at your's employee's email messages, you should also state this in their employment contract.

Make specific mention of the use of attachments within email. Security expert Andy Boylan says unsolicited emails containing attachments should be treated with caution, and that it's bad practice to solicit or send large attachments that are not relevant to the business, as it can clog up a company's network. All email attachments should be scanned for viruses as they can carry all kinds of nasties.

You should think about restricting downloads from the Internet. Boylan advises his clients to state that no software should be downloaded or installed without checking that it's allowable under company policy.

Chissick advises employers to make it clear that it's a matter of gross misconduct if their employees are caught downloading material from the Internet that's considered obscene, indecent or illegal.



Law firms, such as Field Fisher Waterhouse (www.ffwlaw.com) are increasingly being asked to assist with Net use policies

sophisticated software to find out exactly what they're up to. A range of software has been released to track employee's emails, to keep a log of how many hours specific employees have spent online and to find out what sites they've visited. It might sound like Big Brother watching you, but lots of companies already track employee's phone calls, and tracking software is becomingly increasingly popular. Seventeen per cent of all Fortune 1000 companies have installed software that monitors employee's use of the Net and email. Pundits believe 80 per cent of big companies will be using software to monitor employees by 2001. See the box below on Big Brother software.

But if you plan to install tracking software, it's only fair to let your employees know what you're up to. The TUC's view is that employers shouldn't try and sneak in these systems, they should explain what they're doing and why. "Employers need to be up front and reach some sort of agreement – the key word is reasonable. It's reasonable to expect employers to protect themselves and their company, and to try and stamp out malpractice. But you have to balance that against the right of the individual to have some sort of privacy and not to feel they're being spied on, " explains Veal.

The situation is set to get more complicated later this year when the new Human Rights Act comes into force. This act guarantees privacy. And don't forget to be lenient – remember all that unpaid overtime you've asked staff to do and all that work you insisted they take home. im

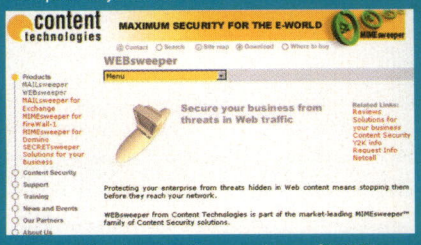
Big Brother software

There's a slew of software designed to keep track of the activities of your employees. Most of the packages will produce comprehensive reports so you can see which Web sites specific members of staff have been looking at, and for how long

MIMEsweeper

Content Technologies supplies a couple of packages to keep tabs on the use of email and Web access in companies. MAILsweeper keeps an eye on SMTP email messages, detecting spoof emails, scanning messages for offensive words and phrases, looking out for viruses and spam, and blocking emails with banned content from going outside your organisation. The software can even alert your personnel department to breaches of email policy.

WEBsweeper looks after Internet access, blocking access to undesirable Web sites. The software also watches out for the use of any active content on Web sites (such as Java or ActiveX code), which could be used to gain unauthorised access to your company's computer systems.



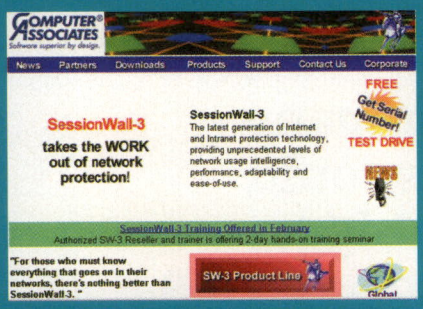
Download evaluation versions of MIME sweeper from the Content Technologies site.

Supplier: Content Technologies
www.mimesweeper.com

Sessionwall

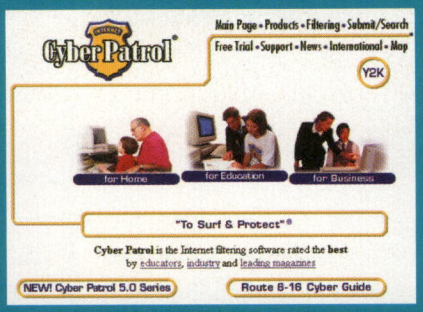
Sessionwall was featured in the *Cutting Edge* documentary that looked at the issue of snoopers at work. The software looks after Internet access, scanning Web sites for dubious content and keeping an eye out for malicious applets and viruses. Sessionwall comes in handy when you want to enforce acceptable use policies – it lets you control Web access for specific users or groups of users.

Supplier: Computer Associates
www.sessionwall.com



CyberPatrol

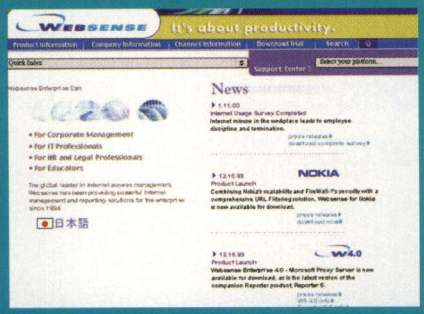
Like Surfwatch, CyberPatrol is better known for its control of home user content, but the company also sells a business product. This software lets you set content restrictions for different users, and you can even change the content restrictions depending on the working hours (so you could give your employees a bit more freedom during their lunch hours). A trial version of the product is available for download from the site.



Supplier: CyberPatrol
www.cyberpatrol.com

Websense

You'll find some interesting facts and figures on this topic at the Websense site, including the results of its survey on Internet misuse in the US workplace. Websense Enterprise lets you monitor, report and manage the traffic travelling from your network to the Internet. The Monitoring Module tracks the traffic going to the Internet – for each user the program can keep a log of the sites visited, the bandwidth consumed and any attempted violations of your company's Internet access policy – scary stuff. If you want to scare your staff, you can download a 30-day trial version of the product from the Websense site.

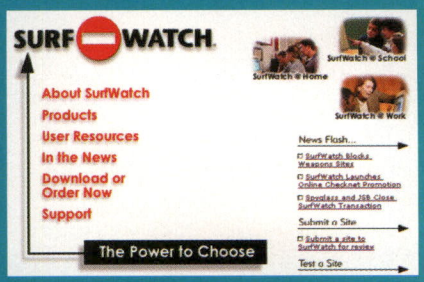


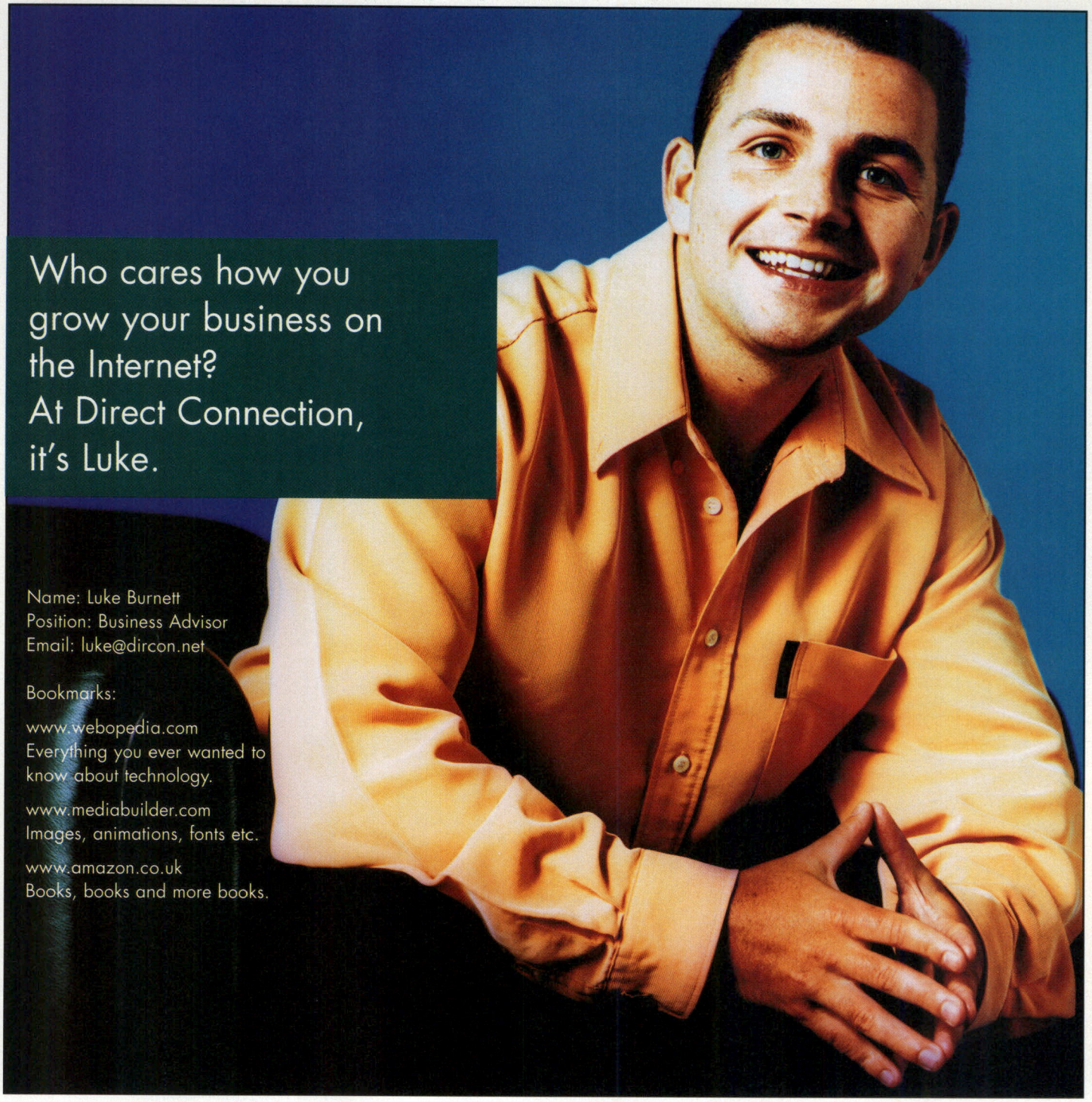
Supplier: Websense
www.websense.com

Surfwatch

As well as supplying Web censorship products for homes and schools, Surfwatch also has a corporate arm. Surfwatch Corporate includes sophisticated monitoring and reporting features and lets you set up varying levels of Internet access for different individuals within the company.

Supplier: Surfwatch
www.surfwatch.com





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Government sites

Online democracy is one of New Labour's favourite phrases, with Mr Blair promising that a quarter of its business the public will be electronic by 2002. Gail Robinson finds there's already plenty of useful and exclusive government information online

When Labour came to power it made some suitably vague promises about the Internet – it would transform the economy, the health service, education and everything in between. While a digital democracy is still a distant dream, it is much easier to get hold of government information now that most of it's on the Internet. New Labour still has some way to go on connecting schools, colleges, libraries and hospitals to the Net, and on training people how to use it. And government departments might not have this e-commerce thing sussed yet, but they're getting there.

What the government's good at is putting thousands of reports, bills, forms and guides online. It's still got some way to go to make this a two-way process – you can't interact with government offices direct.

You can't send in your self-assessment tax return electronically, you can't claim benefits online and you can't register the birth of your children online, yet. Tony Blair has promised that, by 2002, at least a quarter of all transactions with the public will be electronic. You'll be able to use a digital signature online to let the government know you're self-employed, for instance, but this is only a pilot scheme for now.

The Central Information Technology Unit (CITU) is the body set up to help ministers develop their IT strategy, and they've been working to put the government's white paper on modern government into action. You can visit the site (**www.citu.gov.uk/moderngov/whitepaper**) to read some of the promises it's made.

The paper's short on detailed plans, but states: "The information age offers huge scope for organising government activities in new, innovative ways and for making life easier for the public by providing public services in integrated, imaginative and more convenient forms, like single gateways, the Internet and digital TV".

Unsurprisingly, the Royal Web site (**www.royal.gov.uk**) is the most visited 'government' site, followed closely by the War Graves Commission and the Metropolitan Police site. Trawl around the sites, and you'll be amazed at how different they are. Some, like the Public Records Office and Explore Parliament sites, are brilliantly designed, packed with images and easy to navigate.

Other are not as impressive (the Department of Environment and the Home Office sites spring to mind), with text-only pages on dodgy backgrounds. Bouquets go to the Inland Revenue, which is to be commended for its attempts to make the self-assessment tax form make sense. An honourable mention also goes to The Public Records Office, for being a great source of information for budding genealogists.

Whatever you're after from the government, turn the page to find a veritable ballot box full of the best UK government sites on the Web.

OPEN.GOV

Your first port of call should be the Open Government site. It's a huge portal of government information. Take a look at the Daily Updates section and you'll be amazed how much new information is added every day. The top 10 most popular government sites is always worth a visit, since its updated weekly. You can search by organisation or by topic. No matter what you're after, you'll find every other government site somewhere here.

www.open.gov.uk

PARLIAMENT

UNITED KINGDOM PARLIAMENT

Your online guide to the House of Commons and the House of Lords (or what's left of it). You can do all sorts of interesting stuff, like selecting a list of all the female MPs in the Commons, or checking out the Register of Lords' interests. Despite the dull design, this site is an excellent guide to parliamentary systems.

www.parliament.uk

EXPLORE PARLIAMENT

A glitzy guide to government designed for children. There's an online debate chamber, as well as games and puzzles to test your parliamentary knowledge. More seriously, you'll find reports on the bills going through parliament and an excellent guide for teachers.

www.explore-parliament.uk

SERVICE FIRST

This site's a bit confusing – it tackles the issue of better government for older people and aims to improve the effectiveness of government departments and agencies. You can check out the list of aims and find out how well the Government's doing in the Performance Information area of the site.

www.servicefirst.gov.uk

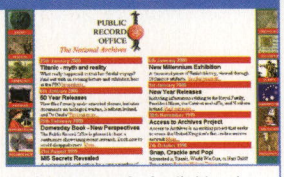
PUBLIC RECORDS

WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

The Commission was set up in 1917 to mark and maintain the graves of members of the Commonwealth who died in the two world wars. This site is a great resource if you're trying to trace lost relatives. You can search the Debt of Honour Register to find personal and service details for the 1.7 million people of the Commonwealth killed in the First and Second World Wars.

www.cwgc.org

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE



Anybody interested in genealogy should check out this site. You'll find the latest news on the project to digitise the 1901 census, plus useful resources for family historians. The Public Records Office is also where sensitive government documents are released – some have even been scanned so you can look at them online.

www.pro.gov.uk

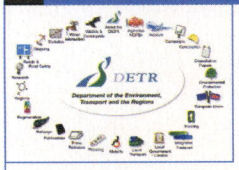
FCO

The FCO site is a handy resource if you're planning to travel abroad to lesser-known countries. The FCO reports on the level of risk associated with various countries in the Travel Advice section, and it's a good source of information on visa requirements.

www.fco.gov.uk

HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

DEPT OF THE ENVIRONMENT



The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions pulled the short straw when it came to Web design, but there's a mass of info here, including the latest railway and local transport developments. Other interesting documents include the annual report on London's transport system and a paper on devolving the decision-making process down to regional level.

www.detr.gov.uk

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

The Environment Agency has come up with an appealing visual site that presents the latest, news, research and data about the environment of England and Wales. The consumer focus of the site is commendable and you'll find a handy section that helps you track down environmental information in your local area.

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Department of Health got saddled with a rather unfortunate URL, but given the state of the service after the flu epidemic, it's probably appropriate. The site's mainly aimed at health care professionals, but it also has a reasonable set of links to other health sites, as well as an interesting customer satisfaction survey of NHS patients.

www.doh.gov.uk

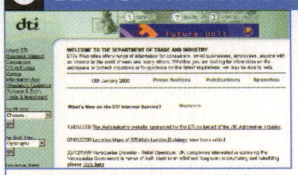
MONEY AND BUSINESS

THE TREASURY

When it comes to Budget time it's all hands on deck at this site. Even now you can dig out information on all the Budgets since 1994. The site's also has a huge collection of economic resources. The prospects for the UK economy and the latest economic indicators reports are regularly updated on the Treasury pages.

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

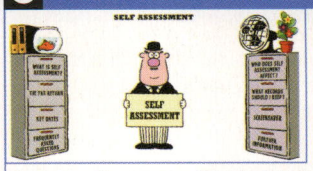
DEPT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY



This site is home to plenty of information for consumers, small and medium businesses and employees. All the latest regulations are covered and there's some handy advice on how you can use technology successfully in your business, along with a collection of guides on Best Business Practice.

www.dti.gov.uk

THE INLAND REVENUE

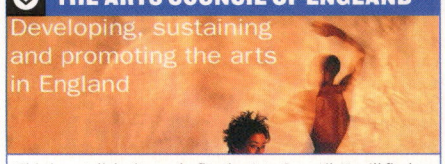


This irritatingly cheery site covers all matters relating to tax and National Insurance. The most popular area of the site has to be the Self Assessment section, and it makes a sterling effort to help you with completing the form. Real sad cases can download an Inland Revenue screensaver.

www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk

ARTS AND CHARITIES

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF ENGLAND



This is a stylish site, as befits the Arts Council. You'll find a review of the Arts Council's activities and a guide to how its funds are distributed. If you're interested in the arts in general you'll be impressed by the links to other excellent arts resources online. Deeply worthy.

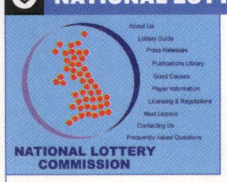
www.artscouncil.org.uk

THE DESIGN COUNCIL

Tony Blair is featured on the front page of this site, wittering on about the importance of design to British industry. You can even check out a webcast of the Prime Minister's speech at the Millennium Products event. The site aims to promote effective design in business, education and government, and you'll find all manner of facts and figures to back it up.

www.design-council.org.uk

NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMISSION



If you want to know exactly how the Lottery money is being spent, you'll find plenty of information on the various Lottery grant programmes at this site. You'll also find some fascinating lottery facts and figures – did you know 83 per cent of households have played the Lottery since its launch in 1994. Richard Branson take note – you can even download the form to apply for the Lottery licence.

www.natlotcomm.gov.uk

spotlightonGovernmentsites

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

NATO

You'll find the latest reports on the situation in Kosovo on this site. There's also an interesting history of the alliance, an introduction to its main policies and a virtual tour that you can take around the NATO headquarters.

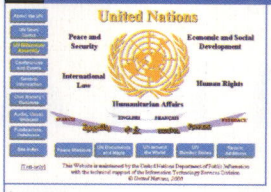
www.nato.int

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

As you'd expect, this is a multilingual site – you can pick your language on the opening page. Beyond this you'll find a rather dull, text-based store of EC facts and policy. If you want to know the state of the economy in Europe, this is the site to visit. You'll also find the official Euro rates here – because English people are interested in the Euro, aren't they?

www.europa.eu.int

THE UNITED NATIONS



The UN news centre keeps you constantly updated on the latest UN activities. For more detailed information you can search through the archive, which includes audio and video clips. There's a mass of information here – it's just a pity there's no easy search facility.

www.un.org

EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT

DFEE

The main DFEE site can only be described as dull, so move swiftly on to the Guide for Parents area. This lets parents know how to help with their children's education in and out of school. There's also a guide to choosing the right school.

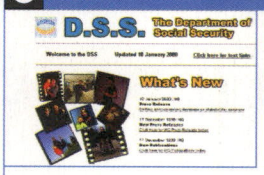
www.dfee.gov.uk

NATIONAL GRID FOR LEARNING

This is an excellent resource for schools, teachers and parents interested in their child's education. The Standards area of the site aims to help teachers raise standards in schools, and you'll find plenty of online discussion groups with topics revolving around the National Curriculum.

www.ngfl.gov.uk

DSS

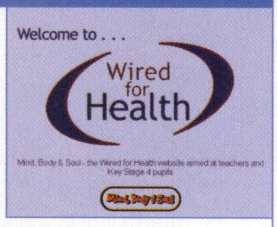


The DSS has to be the most unpopular of all government departments, but if you want to know about your benefits rights or the Child Support Agency, you should visit this site. The general benefit guidance is useful, but if you're thinking of fiddling your dole payments, you should check out the Benefit fraud information pages first.

www.dss.gov.uk

CONSUMER ADVICE

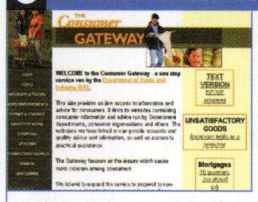
WIRED FOR HEALTH



This funky looking site offers health information for teachers and pupils. The site's good at providing educational material that'll help kids with their schoolwork. The dangers of drugs and alcohol are covered in depth.

www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk

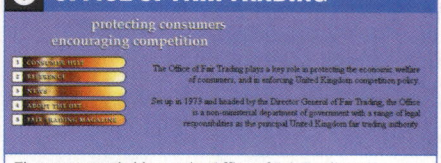
CONSUMER GATEWAY



An excellent source of consumer advice on all manner of products, from buying a car to getting a mortgage. The pricing reports make interesting reading, as does the guide to getting a good deal from your utilities supplier. Anne Robinson will have nothing to offer you once you've taken in all the information on this site.

www.consumer.gov.uk

OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING



The consumer is king at the Office of Fair Trading site. You'll find tips on how to complain effectively and an excellent guide to your rights while shopping on the Net, which is well worth checking out. You can also order the OFT's consumer guides direct from the site.

www.oft.gov.uk

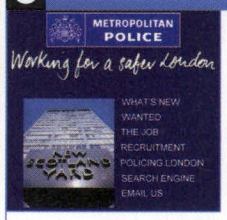
CRIME

DIRECT ACCESS GOVERNMENT

This site was set up with the idea of giving businesses access to regulatory guidance and forms online. So the kind of information you'll find here includes the latest employment legislation, health and safety factsheets and articles on copyright and trademark issues.

www.dag-business.gov.uk

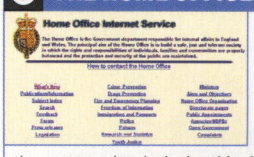
METROPOLITAN POLICE



Rest safe in the knowledge that the Met is working for a safer London. And this site is designed to give you a cuddly feeling about the police force with its photos from the police archives, educational booklets to download and a mass of crime prevention material. Visitors to London can check out the online guide to enjoying the capital safely.

www.met.police.uk

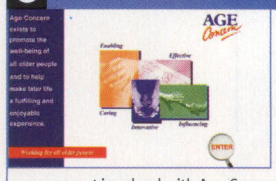
THE HOME OFFICE



The Home Office looks after the internal affairs of England and Wales, but, from the look of it, the IT budget ran out just before they got round to designing this site. Despite the unappealing design, if you dig around you'll find some interesting content, including a briefing paper on the Criminal Justice Bill and heaps of police reports on issues such as race relations in the Metropolitan Police.

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

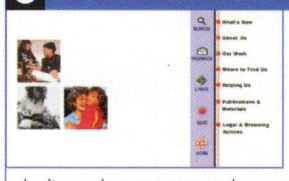
AGE CONCERN



Age Concern promotes the well-being of older people and this site wants your help. You'll find information on how you can get involved with Age Concern by volunteering, joining campaigns or contributing money. For the elderly, there's a guide to the various insurance services offered by Age Concern.

www.ace.org.uk

BRITISH RED CROSS



The British Red Cross provides emergency help to people in need anywhere in the world. As with Age Concern, the charity needs your money, and you can find donation information on here. If you want to get involved in the work of the Red Cross, check out the Job Vacancy section of the site.

www.redcross.org.uk

ENGLISH HERITAGE

English Heritage is the government body charged with protecting our historic monuments. This stylish site will give you plenty of ideas on planning a day out in any of our fine ideas of stately homes or monuments. You'll also find areas of the site devoted to conservation and archaeology.

www.english-heritage.org.uk

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Offer closes 1 April 2000

sitesurvey

This month's top sites rated by experts // brief / budget / content / design

BBC News Online

www.bbc.co.uk/news

This just in – the BBC aims to make as well as break the news with its redesigned news site

Relaunched late last year, BBC News Online has been overhauled using feedback from visitors, drawn from an extensive testing programme conducted by Serco Usability Services. First launched in 1997 with a budget of £3 million, the site's budget is now £7.5 million a year – over 10 per cent of which is provided by the World Service. This also feeds into the site's foreign language services, including Arabic and Chinese translations.

The information on the site is now more clearly available and better cross-referenced. The new layout is also packed – but never cluttered – with content, but it's easier to navigate and read. Casual visitors could still be overwhelmed by the sheer wealth of the choices available, though.

Many items have been added or improved, and most news features have their own In Depth sections. These provide more than enough background material and archive links to keep you up to speed on any news story. The site's been further enhanced by multimedia add-ons, such as video and audio streamed bulletins and links to other relevant sites.

One major enhancement of the BBC News site is its Bayesian, probability-based search engine from Autonomy. This is a much-needed improvement, making searches of the 375,000 stories far more precise.

To provide a wide service to the many different communities and computers that access the site, you can choose a low graphics version of BBC News Online. This downloads much faster and gives you the news in image-free chunks of text. You can then discuss any aspect of the news by clicking on the Talking Point button. You can then email your comments on current events, many of which are posted on the site to invite further debate with other visitors.

Behind the clean and clear design of the BBC News home page lurks a massive quantity of top-quality information

Overall, this revamp can only further the reputation of the BBC's news service. The site offers a wide-ranging, well designed service and even though the occasional wrong-note is sounded – such as the tabloid style paragraph headers for the lead stories – the journalism shines through clearly and articulately.

Mark Whitehead

BBC NEWS ONLINE SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆
Content ★★★★★

THE NEWS AT NET

CNN www.cnn.com
Drudge Report
www.drudgereport.com
SkyNews www.skynews.co.uk

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

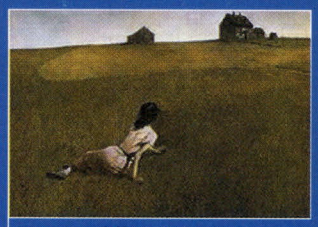
To handle the huge archive that forms the backbone of the BBC News Online site – and to cope with its boast of being 'updated every minute of the day' – the site developers honoured a long-standing plan to switch to an Oracle relational database. "Originally, the site was running with SQL Server, but we'd suffered a couple of database crashes," said Bob Eggington, BBC's project director for the site. "The Oracle database has given us greater capacity to store what currently stands at over half a million stories and cope with over 48,000 page views every day – a figure that's growing daily."

CLICK HERE

Want a new motor? No catches, honest guv...

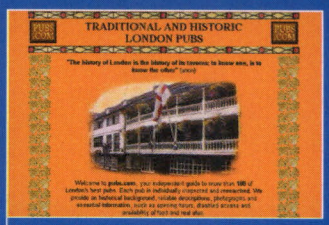
This site really is a click here. You simply enter your email address on the site and click on the different links to enter a range of competitions. It doesn't get much easier than this. Considering the cars on offer, including an Audi TT, a Ford Explorer Jeep, a Rover 25 and a Porsche Boxster, this site is well worth a look. And while you're there, you can enter a few holiday competitions to boot.

www.winacar.co.uk



Art Republic p83

For Special Services p87



London Pubs p90

Gameplay

www.gameplay.com

The mecca of online gaming – let battle commence

Gameplay was only launched last August, but it's already established as a dominant games portal in the UK. Not bad for a site that started life as a mail order company before joining forces with BT's Wireplay online gaming service.

Gameplay's assistant Web editor, Gareth Morris, insists the PC is still the gamer's choice of hardware, despite Dreamcast's bid for online gaming. "Dreamcast hasn't really found its feet in the games market yet," he says.

To use the site, you need to download and install the Wireplay software. Power Play offers more options, but you have to connect through BT, so you might prefer Open Play. I connected to a Wireplay Quake server with Open Play and, within minutes, my gun was loaded and my holster was full. But before I could let off a round of ammo, I'd been 'fragged'. It's not difficult to see why online gamers can run up colossal phone bills.

The site supports over 100 games and you can download some free of charge. All the usual suspects are covered, so strategy games such as Age of Empires and Red Alert rub shoulders with shoot 'em ups like Duke Nukem and Quake. GamePlay's online shop stocks 3,000 products and claims to house the world's largest games server farm.

The Games Ladder lets you challenge fellow gamers – score more points and you'll climb the results table. It's the online equivalent of playground conkers.

The site's content is unbeatable, despite the occasional glaring spelling mistake. There are a few design problems, though. Web manager Guy Cowan says the black background and white text "matches our brand colours," but it makes the text difficult to read and slow to download. And despite Morris's claim that many of the site's visitors connect via fast modems, a 50k home page is still rather large.

Paul Bennett

Gameplay offers a great range of games, but keep an eye on your phone bill

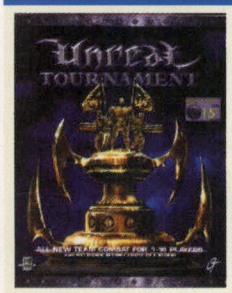
GAMEPLAY SCORES...

Design ★★★☆☆
Content ★★★★★

GAME OVER – INSERT MORE COINS TO CONTINUE

GameZone www.gamezone.com
GameSpot www.gamespot.com
Game Slice www.gameslice.com

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?



Games are hosted on 80 physical drives and five Sparc Stations, which are used for high tech games such as Air Attack. "We mainly use rack-mounted Pentium Pro IIs and IIIs, but we still have a few older machines for the less demanding games," says Oscar Clark, marketing manager of Wireplay Vision. Online gamers need to process small amounts of information quickly. "Over a 56k modem, UK ISPs can retrieve UK-based pages in about 180 pings. We typically score 150, and on a good day it can be as low as 105 pings," explains Clark.

Homeworksolver

www.homeworksolver.com

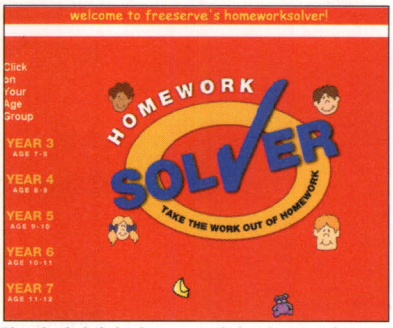
Freeserve shows its primary colours

The latest addition to Freeserve's education channel, Homework Solver, aims to add to the ISP's quality family content. The site was created by education specialist, Illustrated Library (**www.illustratedlibrary.com**), the new media arm of C&B Publishing Group.

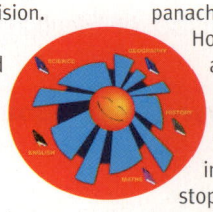
Developed with the help of teachers, the site uses an interactive question and answer format to consolidate National Curriculum topics. The site might look a little basic, but it's designed for young children to access without supervision.

Homework Solver is easy to navigate, and once you've selected the relevant subject, you're asked a series of questions. These are skilfully brought to life by simple animations, images and answer buttons.

The simple design makes it easier to introduce new material, but also stops the visitor from becoming bored. "We're know children's attention span is short," says Suneel Jaitly, MD of Illustrated Library. "Homework should be fun, not a chore."

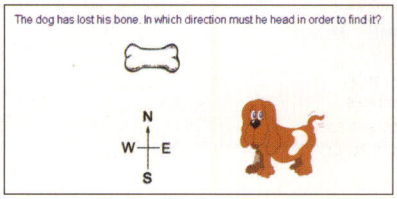


The site is bright, breezy and simple to navigate



Other educational sites cover single subjects in more detail and with more panache, but the advantage of Homework Solver is its scope. It aims to include everything that a child might encounter in their school year. As Jaitly points out, the site "gives the children the information they need in a one-stop resource". Now we await unmetered calls to ease parents' worries about the phone bill.

Matthew Grice



HOMEWORK SOLVER SCORES

Design ★★★☆☆
Content ★★★★☆

A DIFFERENT CLASS

Children's Forest
www.childrensforest.co.uk
Dynamo's Den www.bbc.co.uk/education/dynamo/home.shtml
Educate the Children www.educate.org.uk

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peoplesound.com

*one per household, while stocks last

7008

Art Republic

www.artrepublic.com

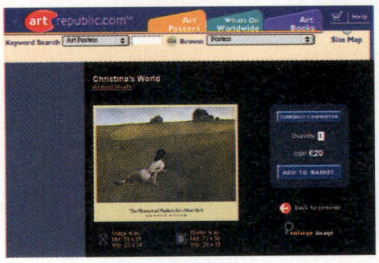
Online gallery, poster shop, book store, reference work and museum guide in one

Art Republic succeeds where most art sites fail – it makes the topic interesting, easy to understand and enjoyable. It boasts a global guide that ranges from artist biographies and museum info to the best in art around the world and online shopping.

The site is the brainchild of Lawrence Alkin, whose experience stems from running a poster gallery in Brighton for 20 years. "It developed from a gallery to online poster sales and has grown to the site you see today, encompassing poster and book sales, artist biographies and a What's on Worldwide search facility," explains Alkin.

The site went from concept to launch in seven months, with the help of creative designer Nick Davis, and costs were kept to a six-figure sum. "We wanted to support the product with informative content to enrich the experience of using the site," says Davis. "You can buy a poster and learn something about the life of the artist who produced it."

Pick a work of art and you can learn about the artist, buy the poster, find out where it's on view, and shop for background reading. All we need now are the T-shirts and keyrings...



Art Republic is an impressive achievement. A lot of thought has gone into its construction and design, and the expertise of the people involved really shows – just as well for an art site. Highlights range from a section explaining complicated art terms to a biography area.

Also worth a look is its guide to the best art museums around the world, while a soon to be expanded worldwide guide offers the best in art exhibitions and events globally. You can even you buy books and posters on the site. There are good reproductions of the posters, so you can be sure you won't end up paying for a monstrosity.

Art Republic is an essential bookmark for art lovers, but its style and tone will even appeal to those who have never set foot in a gallery. You'll at least leave the site knowing a little more about the Die Blauer Reiter movement. Perhaps.

Caroline Westbrook

ART REPUBLIC SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆
Content ★★★★☆

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Tate Gallery www.tate.org.uk
National Portrait Gallery www.npg.org.uk
New York Metropolitan Museum Of Art www.metmuseum.org

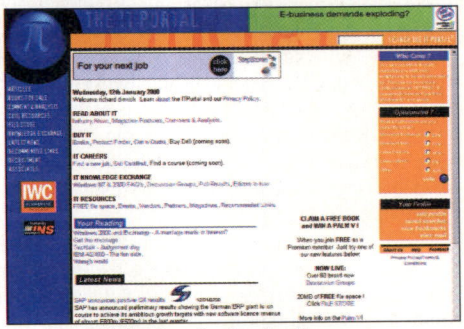
HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

The What's On Worldwide section – which is rapidly expanding to cover more than just London – is, according to an Art Republic spokesperson, "not too technological, but it's an advance for art Web sites. The WOW facility was created using an SQL development server. This links to access databases, which provide the information from sources all over the world."

The IT Portal

www.theitportal.com

Dedicated information for IT professionals



The IT Portal is let down by slow-loading pages

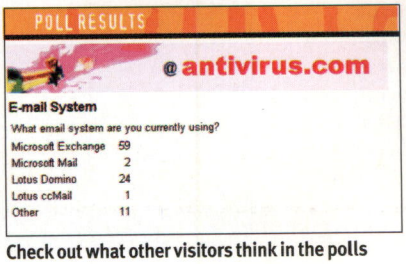
The IT Portal is aimed at professionals who want to find what they want on the Internet quickly and easily. The site includes everything from reviews and technical documents to book sales and software downloads.

The service is expected to expand across Europe, alongside the launch of further specific industry portals. MD Andrew Evans has partnerships with a wide range of information and service providers who'll put links to The IT Portal on their sites.

"The site needed £500,000 to get a kick start, which mainly came from 30 private investors," says Allan Rutherford, the company's new media sales manager. The IT Portal aims to personalise content for its visitors – which means registration. "This lets us profile information on users and change the site accordingly," says Rutherford.

The site offers the choice of a quick name and email registration or a more involved membership sign-up process. This seemed simple, but a recent survey found that registration on Web sites puts off 40 per cent of visitors. The IT portal might want to rethink this dated policy.

Lotus Domino and Lotus Notes are the software power behind the HTML. These integrated applications make the site smooth and easy to run for Evans and his team.



Check out what other visitors think in the polls

The page structure is simple, but insists on using three main frames for banner, menu and content – again showing that the developers are behind the times. The site has a resolution of 1024 x 768 – standard for most IT professionals, but people with 800 x 600 resolution will have trouble.

The menu frame slows the site down, as the frame reloads every time you select an item, either to extend the list of menu options or to refresh each GIF image. If you enter the site from anywhere other than the home page source, the banner covers the site's title if you're using a lower resolution.

The bookstore appears in a separate window, which helps with navigation through this extensive part of the site. Once again, the page is poorly constructed, with four frames. This isn't just annoying, it's also detrimental, as the content frame is smaller, so less information can be shown.

James Bavington

THE IT PORTAL SCORES...

Design ★★☆☆☆
Content ★★★☆☆

IT'S A WONDERUL WORLD

Linux Portal Site www.linuxlinks.com
UK News Portal www.newsnow.co.uk
Inter/Intranet Pros Portal www.webtrends.net

Movietrak

www.movietrak.com

Rent DVDs online and get them delivered to your door

Your local video store might not be a thing of the past yet, but if the likes of Movietrak take off, its days could well be numbered. This ingenious site, which makes up with content and ideas what it lacks in snazzy design and clever features, lets you rent DVDs from the comfort of your PC and have them delivered to your door.

Given the rise in popularity of DVDs in the UK, the site's central premise is excellent, and is a whole new challenge for head honcho Guy Lawler, who used to manage the Videozone rental and retail outlet in London's Knightsbridge.

"Online rental is just a simpler way of doing things for greater convenience," says Lawler. "Movietrak is definitely going to increase competition for rental stores and will offer a greater variety of DVDs for the consumer at a much lower cost. Online DVD rental is definitely the way forward."

The site is still in its early stages, having launched in January after a six-month planning period (and costing upwards of six figures). You can get your hands on around 600 titles – if Movietrak doesn't have it, chances are it hasn't been released yet. You'll find the rental process easy and secure. My attempt to secure a double bill of *Austin Powers* and *Bride Of Chucky* was every bit as simple as walking into Blockbuster and taking them from the shelves.

You can browse through summaries of the titles on offer, check out the top 10 rented titles in each genre and find out what's due to be released. You'll soon see new areas like celebrity reviews, customer testimonials, competitions and film previews.

If Movietrak has a fault, it's the design. It's simple and functional, but it isn't visually exciting. It ultimately relies on a selection of DVD sleeves for effect. But Movietrak could cause a revolution in online shopping, and with new features planned, it could go from strength to strength.

Caroline Westbrook

MOVIETRAK SCORES...

Design ★★★☆☆

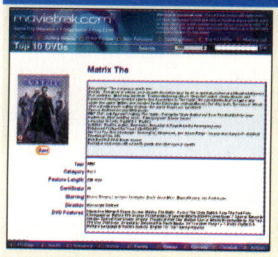
Content ★★★★☆

THE DVD MAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE

Blackstar
www.blackstar.co.uk
Entertainment Express
www.entexpress.co.uk
Blockbuster
www.blockbuster.co.uk

Movietrak's service is great, but the site's design is uninspired

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?



Renting DVDs over the Net sounds like a fantastic idea, but how does it work? "The rental system was designed using CGI, with Perl interfacing with an SQL database (mySQL) on Linux servers," explains a spokeswoman for Proteus, the site's designers. Guy Lawler is particularly proud of one of the site's upcoming area which will let you pre-book your DVDs online. "This software will be up and running before March, so customers will be able to order a new title before its release and receive the DVD on the day it comes out."

Cyberphotographer

www.cyberphotographer.com

Disgrace yourself at the office party –for everyone to see

Cyberphotographer is an online photo album and print ordering site, based around an event photography service. For a fee, Cyberphotographer will come to your private or corporate party, take pictures, and post the resulting images on its Web site by the next morning. You and your guests can then order colour prints of whatever – or whoever – you want.

Posting photos on a Web site is nothing new, but mixing the immediacy of digital photography with the Internet is a clever idea. Site founder and developer, Richard Braine, saw the combination as a logical step. "It wasn't a brainwave type of revelation, just a natural progression," he says. "It struck me as sensible to link the businesses to the benefit of both areas."

The result is an elegant site that's easy to navigate. It's light on plug-ins and the high quality images load incredibly fast. A scrolling band of thumbnails makes it easy to find the photo you want, while a single click takes you to a straightforward credit card ordering page.

The site's client list is impressive and ranges from society weddings to glitzy corporate parties. Sadly, the majority of photographs are password-protected, so only the chosen few can view them. "We're not *Hello*, we're not *The Sun*," says Braine. "We offer our clients the confidentiality they want, so partygoers can relax and have fun."

Despite the originality of the idea, you have to question the wider market of the site . Ironically, the people who'll benefit most from Cyberphotographer could be the competition. Soon, wedding photographers could be forced to post pictures on the Web as part of the package, so guests can go through what they did the night before as they nurse their Bloody Marys.

Tim Harrison

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

"We charge between £300 and £1,000, depending on the event," says site founder and Kobal award-winning photographer, Richard Braine (www.maguirebraine.co.uk), "but we work hard for it." He says his work has only just begun when he's released the shutter. "We want to give customers a superb quality print – particularly when it comes to colour balancing (a hazards with digital photos). We spend a lot of time editing and tidying images before printing them. I don't know what we'd do without Apple."

CYBERPHOTOGRAPHER SCORES...

Design ★★★★☆

Content ★★☆☆☆

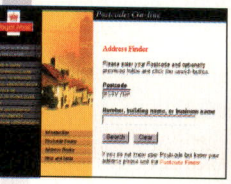
PICTURE THIS

e-photomail www.e-photomail.com
Studio Images www.studioimages.co.uk
Getty Images www.getty-images.com

CLICK HERE

A right royal resource

Remember when BT's hugely useful online directory inquiries service (**www.bt.com/phonebook**) arrived on the sly? Well, the Royal Mail has done something similar. Postcodes Online lets you find any postcode in the UK. Just enter an address and the Postcode Finder does the rest. You can also do reverse searches, so you can get an address from a postcode. The only drawback is a limit of 50 checks in 24-hours.



www.postcodes.royalmail.co.uk

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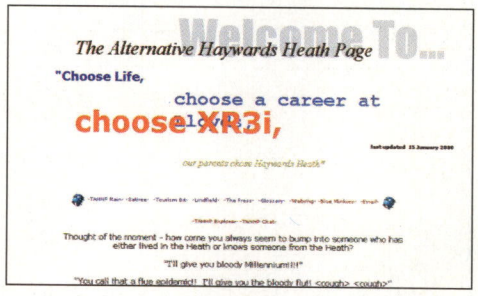
HomeImprovement

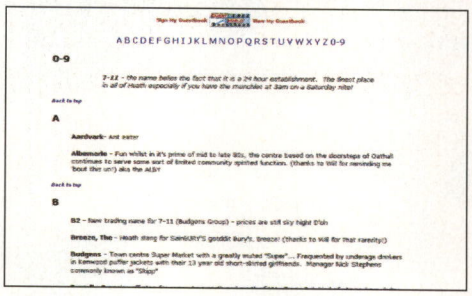
Each month **Richard Dinnick** and a team of professional Web designers rate and review readers' home pages. Submit your site to **richardd@internet.emap.com**

The Alternative Haywards Heath

This site about life in Haywards Heath, Sussex, is hoping to be the talk of the town

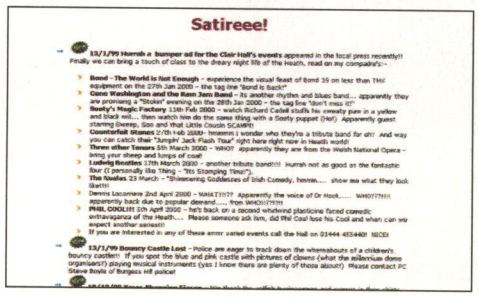
SCROLLING
Remember that people's time is precious. If you don't give your visitors an idea of what's on each page, they might not bother scrolling down to find out. Either summarise what your pages contain (at the top of the page) or use secondary navigation.

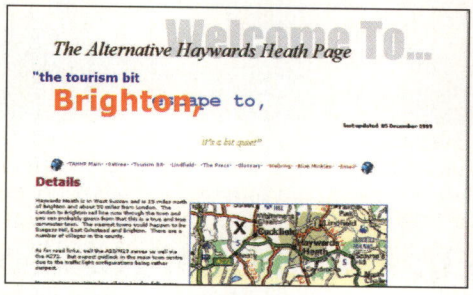




ADVERTISING
You might be forgiven for thinking that this site carries no banner ads, but it does. They're right at the bottom of some of the pages, under a large gap of white space. You have to scroll for a while before you see the banner ad, so the chance of making any money from it, in this position, is minimal.

HEADINGS
If you're going to design fancy headings for your pages, make sure people can read them. The introductory sentences on some pages of this site are unreadable. It might work better if it was animated in some way. And they takeup the whole of your screen on a 600 x 800 monitor setting.





EMBEDDED SOUNDS
Most embedded sounds are gratuitous and irritate visitors, particularly if they're at work. Even major sites don't seem to have realised this, but that's no excuse for smaller sites to emulate them. If you have lots of noises and music clips on your site, give visitors the option of switching them off.

Living in Haywards Heath must be like belonging to a club. Not like a club on Pall Mall, you understand – it wouldn't be exclusive enough – but a secret society sort of club. Think Freemasons without the funny handshakes and architectural deities. Or that's the impression you might get from Chris Ko's site.

The biggest problem with the Alternative Haywards Heath is it doesn't welcome you. Quite the opposite. There are in-jokes and comments that you'd only get if you're a resident of the fair town in Sussex, and you feel slightly alienated if you aren't. This starts on the first page.

Last year we dealt with a similar page that covered the closed life of a group of commuters on Jeff Jenkins' home page (**www.cewap.freeserve.co.uk**). This site lets you into that closed world, and Chris could learn a few lessons from it. To be fair, the 25 year old provides an entertaining glossary of terms elsewhere on the site. Perhaps he could combine the two by linking words on the front page with their definitions.

The rest of the site has some good resources for people considering a visit to Haywards Heath. The Tourism Bit section has a map, details of how to find the town and a link to Up My Street (**www.upmystreet.com**), *Internet Magazine*'s site of the year. Chris has also included information on Lindfield, the best-kept village In Sussex.

The Satiree deals with a mixture of news and nightlife (the two seem to dovetail in this neck of the woods). You'll also find an area dedicated to the Sussex Puma – a seldom-seen black beast that prowls the streets of Chuckfield, and a history of Sussex in the 20th Century.

SITE SPEC

www.the-plaza.cwc.net/haywards_heath_page.htm

CREATED BY
Chris Ko

LAUNCH DATE
October 1998

CURRENT SIZE
2.5Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
Eight hours

NUMBER OF PAGES
Around 40 pages

MOTIVATION
"I saw the lame attempts to be humourous about our town of Haywards Heath on the Net and thought I could do a lot better."

WHAT NEXT?
"I'm interested in going commercial, but juggling updates with my day job is a struggle. I'm also keen to develop something along the same lines of **www.knowhere.co.uk**, with affiliated sites across the country."

Chris put his opus together using FrontPage and the professionals' favourite, Dreamweaver, to clean up the code. He admits that his pages were "pretty dire". As a result, the site's only attracted around 1,000 hits. But Chris has had some positive feedback – one visitor emailed him to say they "never knew Haywards Heath was so interesting". Irony is alive and well in Sussex.

The impression you get from the site is that it hasn't been carefully thought through. A satirical site about life in the sleepy town of Haywards Heath could be highly successful. The site could become an online version of BBC 2's *League of Gentlemen*, with character sketches complementing the excellent glossary. It might take up a bit more of his time, but go on Chris, give it a bit more nurturing.

THE ALTERNATIVE HAYWARDS HEATH SCORES...

Design ★★★☆☆
Content ★★★☆☆

CHRIS RECOMMENDS

Railtrack
www.railtrack.co.uk
BBC News
www.bbc.co.uk/news
The Force Net
www.theforce.net

TRADE SECRETS

Margaret Manning
commercial director
Reading Room
www.readingroom.com

Chris used a WYSIWYG editor to generate this site. These often get code incorrect, so don't take the code they produce as gospel – check the HTML. On one page of this site the table width has been fixed at 1421 pixels. This can cause horizontal scrolling, depending on monitor settings. The background image is being forced to perform a number of repeats across a needlessly wide page. The code also reveals a mass of unnecessary 1 x 1 pixel spaces between other odd-sized table blocks. This is also a result of using a WYSIWYG editor.

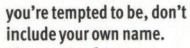
For Special Services

The girls, the cars, the films... they're all here at a top quality James Bond tribute site

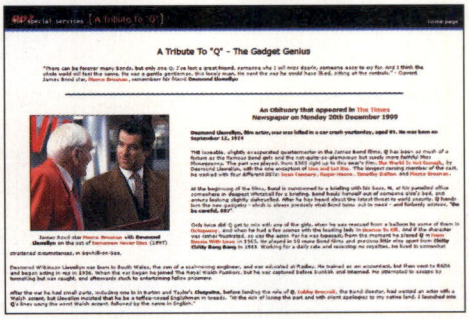
ALT TAGS
Always check your site to see what visitors would see if they had their images turned off in their Web browser. On this site's first page, you wouldn't

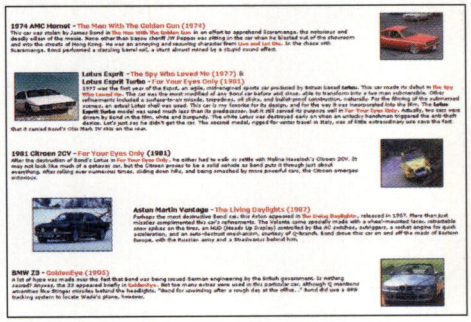
even see the site's name. Not helpful for people who use talking browsers or browse without images.

KEYWORDS
Web sites use keywords so that search engines can provide browsers with accurate results from their searches. In the source code of this site you'll see the words 'Nitin Parmar' and 'London'. These aren't relevant to the subject matter at all. However vain



you're tempted to be, don't include your own name. It's a waste of space.





NAVIGATION
Consistent and clear. That's all you have to remember. Don't rely on the Back and Forward buttons for your primary navigation.

COMING SOON
For Special Services commits the double sin of including 'coming soon' sections, which are synonymous with the dreaded 'under construction' pages, and making the announcements GIFs rather than text, so some people might not even see them.

What do you do if you've just finished your GCSEs, you've got access to the Internet and you're a massive James Bond fan? The answer, in Nitin Parmar's case, is to build a site dedicated to your hero. So instead of enjoying the hazy days of summer 1998, Nitin slaved away in his room for three months to create this impressive Bond site.

While Nitin claims For Special Services wasn't influenced by other sites, it uses a black background and red text to evoke the nature of England's most famous special agent.

Many James Bond sites use this design, but on For Special Services the black and red motif is dropped the moment you move beyond the front page, making you wonder why Nitin keeps the front page looking the way it does.

"The design you see at the moment was conjured up in my GCSE chemistry classes by my design consultant Ed Potter," says Nitin. This might explain the inconsistency, as it's difficult to work out the nuances of Web layout and navigation when you're supposed to be learning the periodic table.

In order to explain how a fellow pupil can be Nitin's design consultant, we should point out then when he's not studying for his A levels, Nitin's the MD of his own Web design company, called Roydburn. His goals were to keep the site simple, "to appeal to novices and experienced Web users. Non-cluttered pages and easy navigation had to be key features," he says.

Other than the front page, the rest of the site is uncluttered and easy on the eye. Unfortunately, Nitin's idea of easy navigation is the back button, for which he loses points. That said, you'll find some great features on For Special Services. It's a compact site, covering all the usual Bond-related subjects. So you're guaranteed to find areas covering the Bond girls, the Bond cars and the Bond films.

To enhance the site, Nitin's culled interviews and reviews from other media, and this gives it a slight edge over all but the most professional 007 sites. Nitin would've achieved a higher content score if more of the impressive material on this site had been original. He's clearly interested in the subject, so he should try writing something about it.

For Special Services also acts as an excellent example for designers who are wondering how to deal with the thorny issue of copyright. While most large organisations will turn a blind eye to instances of copyright infringement on personal home pages, it's still illegal and capable of landing you in hot water. Nitin lists the copyrights for all the images he uses on the site, and each of the reviews he's reproduced have their appropriate credits.

The diversity of subject matter has attracted around 55,000 visitors since he launched it two years ago using straight HTML. Nitin works two or three hours a week to keep the site up to the date with the latest news, and he hopes to overhaul For Special Services when he's learnt JavaScript after his A Levels.

SITE SPEC

www.roydburn.com/007

CREATED BY
Nitin Parmar

LAUNCH DATE
June 1996

CURRENT SIZE
7.66Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
Three months

NUMBER OF PAGES
142 pages

MOTIVATION
"I just wanted to create a site that would appeal to young and old Bond fans. It's been a testing ground for things I've discovered on the Web."

WHAT NEXT?
"Hopefully a domain name. I'd like to introduce more affiliation schemes, like the ones that can be found at The Merchandise Store (www.roydburn.com/007/the-merchandise-scheme.html). At the moment, it's costing me a bit too much to run, so sponsorship is a possibility."

TRADE SECRETS

Richard Dinnick
site reviews editor
Internet Magazine
richardd@internet.emap.com

The one thing journalists know about is spelling. They know they mustn't submit copy that has spelling errors in it. But we have sub-editors to pick us up if there are mistakes. This safety valve ensures that spelling mistakes are rare. Few webmasters have the same luxury, but you should at least put your site content through a spellchecker and read what you've written. Sites such as BBC News (http://news.bbc.co.uk) could be forgiven for small errors as they update most pages at least once a day. The same cannot be said of many personal home pages – bad spelling makes your site look unprofessional, or even ignorant of your subject matter.

FOR SPECIAL SERVICES SCORES...

Design ★★☆☆☆
Content ★★★☆☆

NITIN RECOMMENDS

Cricinfo
www.cricket.org
BBC News
www.bbc.co.uk
Teamtalk
www.imsport.co.uk

Searching Questions
www.mirago.co.uk
Mirago, the UK Search Engine
● High UK relevance
● Safer surfing for kids
● Advanced search features
● Up to date results
● Guides, News, TV, Sports...
mirago

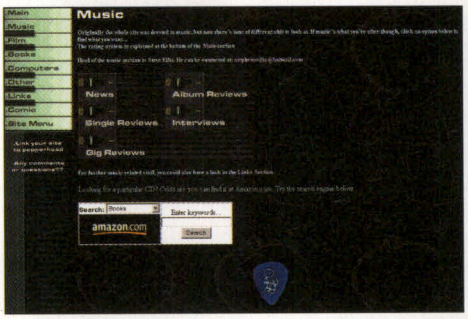
Pepperhead

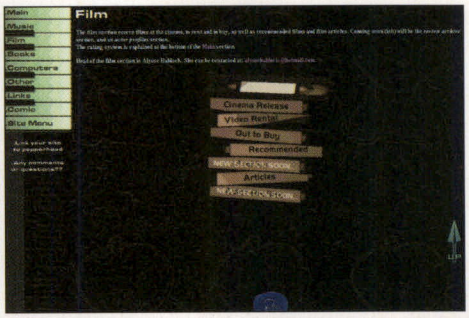
An eclectic mix of news and reviews, plus the site's very own comic creation

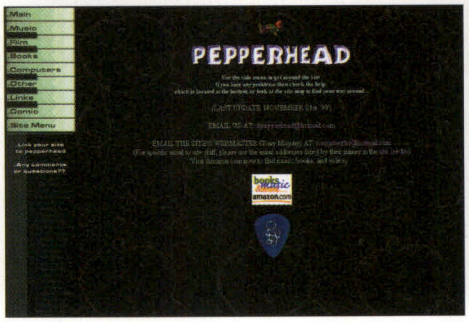
UPDATES
Either update the site daily, or don't make a rod for your own back by including a Last Updated sign on your pages. Similar rules apply to 'recent additions'. On Pepperhead, the date of the most recent addition, and the last updated sign, is 21 November 1999 – which doesn't look good.

FRAMES
Aargh! If you want people to find your site, take it out of the frameset and make it search engine friendly. Some browsers also find it hard to make sense of Web sites that use frames.

GRAPHICS
Remember to size your graphics with width and height commands. Web browsers then leave enough space while the images are downloading.







This stops the page from jumping about. And always add ALT tags.

TEXT AND BACKGROUND COLOURS
We always advise sites to avoid light text on a dark background since it's difficult to read and to print out. But Pepperhead has committed an even worse sin. It has dark text

on a dark background, with links changing from a light mauve colour to dark purple, which is almost impossible to read.

META KEYWORDS
This site doesn't have any META keywords, which you can easily include in your HTML. You'll notice a distinct improvement in your search engine ranking.

The first thing that strikes you about Pepperhead is how dark the site appears onscreen. While this reflects the humour of its eponymous hero – the central character in the site's online comic book – it isn't a good choice of colour for a Web site. This becomes apparent in the Comics section. The computer-created images are small, dark and unclear. A lighter background would go some way to solving this problem.

Like many home pages, Pepperhead is an eclectic mix of interests, opinions and it's owner's creative efforts. But Tony Murphy, the site's webmaster, doesn't make the most of his Pepperhead character, only using it in the Comic section. This is a shame, since the other sections of the site – music, films, books, computers and links – could do with some added colour and character.

Unusually for Home Improvement candidates, the Pepperhead Web site is a group effort. Tony runs and designs the site, but five other people act as regular contributors to the film, music and books sections. Alysse Baldock is head of film, Steve Ellis is head of music, with Andy Duffy providing band interviews, while Carole Baldock and the enigmatically named Cassia write book reviews.

Tony, a 19 year old graphic designer, used Notepad for all of the HTML, with Photopaint and Photoshop for graphics and scan editing. "I used a little JavaScript, but I haven't really bothered to learn much about it yet, so it's just the simple stuff like rollover buttons." And apart from the inadvisable use of frames and the monotonous black background, the site is well designed.

Tony's put his rollover button design to good use with the creation of an excellent primary navigation system in the guise of a keyboard. "I only made the menu buttons light up because all the cool kids were doing it!" he explains. Tony admits to being something of a Net head, but has his habit under control. "I've been on every day for about two years now," he says. "I could give up any time I like, though. I'm not addicted."

Despite the time he's spent online, he still can't work out the browsing habits of other Internet users. "You can put loads of work into bringing people as much information and pictures as you can, but they'd still rather watch badly animated [and misspelt] hampsters who dance to a sample that doesn't even loop," he complains. "People are weird."

Not that Pepperhead is the most conventional site on the Web as a response. It aims to appeal to the eclectic tastes of many Net users. So you'll find reviews of obscure bands rubbing shoulders with mainstream films and popular books. Some general words of warning, though – the tiniest things can irritate your visitors.

Pepperhead has a few incorrect facts, such as stating that Denise Richardson is the star of *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, when it's Denise Richards. Rule one of writing for the public is to get your facts right, but then, as Tony says: "There is such a thing as useless information – it's what Pepperhead's based upon."

SITE SPEC

www.classicspage.com/pepperhead

CREATED BY
Tony Murphy

LAUNCH DATE
April 1999

CURRENT SIZE
4Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
A few days

NUMBER OF PAGES
More than 300 pages

MOTIVATION
"I was using free space and I wasn't allowed to use any adult or illegal material, so after a long think I got a few mates together and we did some reviews instead!"

WHAT NEXT?
"More Web space, downloads, a domain name and proper email addresses for the site. "We're hoping to do some competitions for free films and stuff, but that's all a bit sketchy at the moment."

PEPPERHEAD SCORES...

Design ★★★☆☆
Content ★★★★☆

TONY RECOMMENDS

Red Meat
www.redmeat.com
Joecartoon.com
www.joecartoon.com
Internet movie Database
www.imdb.com

TRADE SECRETS

Margaret Manning
commercial director
Reading Room
www.readingroom.com

Always put image widths and heights into your code. You can do this by entering them into the image tag. For instance:

```
<img src="images /sunset.jpg"
    width=147 height=39 alt=
    "sunset" border="0">
```

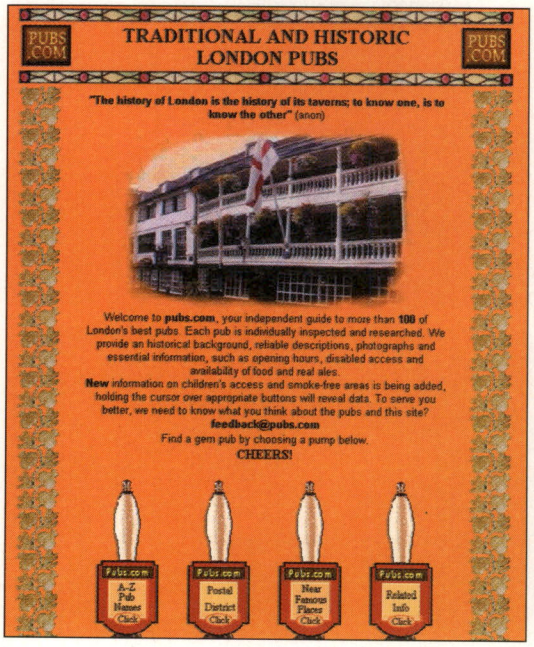
The Web browser will read this code and leave the correct space for your image and display the text around it as it downloads. If you don't use image widths and heights, the browser uses default image sizes and the whole page adjusts itself periodically as it recognises the actual size of each image. This causes your text to jump around during the download.

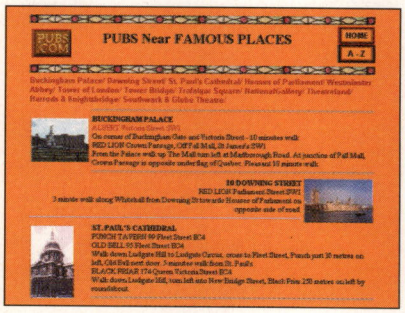
London Pubs

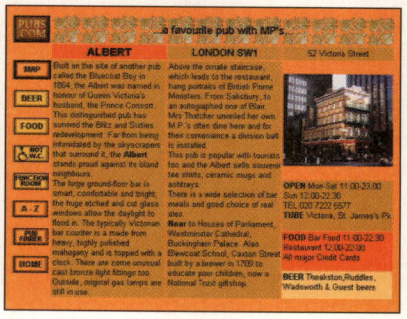
A great URL, well written exclusive content and good design – what more could you want?

NAVIGATION
There are many solutions to the common navigation problems. This site's answer is to put the primary navigation on the right hand side of the screen, in boxes designed to emulate the icons for one of its sections. Unfortunately, this isn't consistent across the site, occasionally moving to the top of the page.

ICONS
It's a good idea to design your own icons for your site if you want to get an idea across more quickly and directly than a string of words can. But if you go to the trouble of designing them, you might as well use them. On this site they aren't used until you've selected your pub. Why not have the icons start at a higher level so that people can see facilities before clicking on a destination?







ALT TAGS
It's no good designing icons that don't have Alt tags explaining what they are. If you have your images switched off for faster browsing, you won't be able to tell what they mean and their whole purpose is defeated. All pictures on the site should have Alt tags.

PICTURES THAT LINK
It's simple to make your pictures link through the pages they're illustrating, so do it. If you don't, it could confuse visitors and potentially waste their time.

Paul Keating is on something of a mission. Last March the 44 year old ITN cameraman set out to visit, rate and review the best pubs in London. So far, this public (as in house) spirited (as in gils) Herculean task has taken Paul to 104 public houses in his never-ending thirst for knowledge.

The design of the site clearly reflects Paul's sense of humour. The combination of an orange flock wallpaper effect background, the stained glass headings and oak leaves with acorns motif gives you the feeling that you're staring at the wall of a traditional London pub. But this isn't just any wall – it's one where someone knowledgeable has written a great guide to the capital's boozers.

For this is truly a great online guide. You can search the database of pubs that Paul has built up by postcode area or name, and you can even look for public houses nestling beside some of London's best-known landmarks such as Trafalgar Square, Buckingham Palace and St Paul's Cathedral in the Famous Places section of the site. So if you're planning a combination of sightseeing and boozing, you're sorted.

In Paul's independent guide to London's best pubs, each pub has individually inspected and researched. He includes an history of each fine drinking establishment, descriptions, photographs and essential information, such as opening hours, whether there is disabled access, whether the pub serves food, and which real ales are on offer. He has even designed little icons for these attributes, which help you quickly identify which pubs are best suited to your needs.

For Londoners and anyone planning a visit to London, this site is an excellent resource – and just as thorough as the Good Pub Guide (**www.goodguides.com**). And to make his site even more competitive, Paul is adding information on children's access to the pubs and whether they offer smoke-free areas. He does admit that the site was influenced by other sites but only by their warm and welcoming feeling – "like a good traditional pub".

Paul is passionate about his pubs. "So many have been destroyed or refurbished thoughtlessly," he says forlornly. "Pubs are part of our heritage and I hope my site helps visitors to appreciate them." So far, over 27,000 visitors have appreciated Paul's hard work. It's certainly one worth bookmarking. And thanks to his forward thinking, the site's address is not at all difficult to remember. The URL pubs.com is a huge asset to the site as well as being worth a few bob.

Amazingly, Paul has only been on the Net for less than two years, but he put the site together using raw HTML, with no editing tools, and only a Web design book to help him.

He describes his relationship with the Internet as businesslike. "I'm not a great surfer," he says. "I use the Net to find what I want, since I don't have much spare time. That said, it's easy to be sidetracked." Part of that spare time he's already short of is taken up with maintaining the site – for about 10 hours a week. "It takes up more hours when I've been visiting pubs and have to write them up," Paul adds. "Gathering the data – visiting the pubs – is time-consuming too, but enjoyable, as I have to test the beers!"

SITE SPEC

www.pubs.com

CREATED BY
Paul Keating

LAUNCH DATE
March 1999

CURRENT SIZE
5Mb

DEVELOPMENT TIME
One week

NUMBER OF PAGES
120 pages

MOTIVATION
"To share my enthusiasm for traditional pubs and show what makes them special."

WHAT NEXT?
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TRADE SECRETS

Richard Dinnick
site reviews editor
Internet Magazine
richardd@internet.emap.com

The importance of a good domain name cannot be underestimated. It is the very essence of a well-remembered site. There are still plenty of good domain names out there and you can start your hunt for one at All Who Is (www.allwhois.com). Here you can type in any domain in the world and the search engine will find out if someone has already nabbed it. Or you can try register.com (www.register.com) to perform multiple searches. And register a .com name for as little as $35 (around £22).

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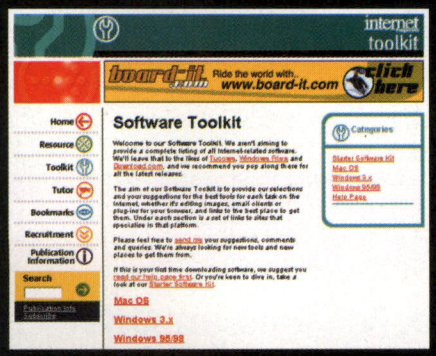

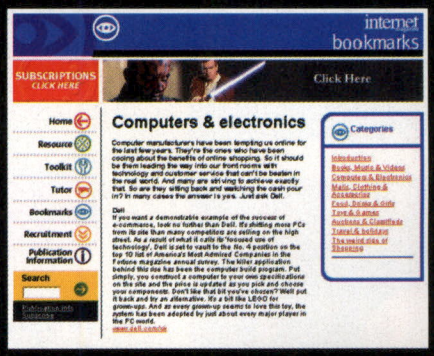

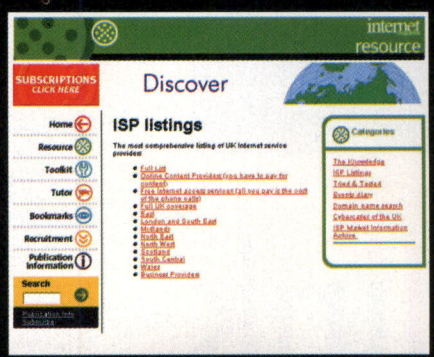

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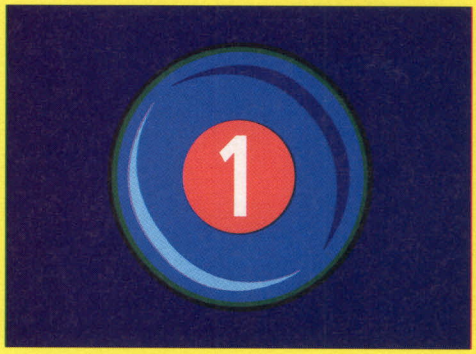

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Your questions answered

If you've got a Net problem, email it to us and we'll field it to our distinguished panel of experts. From Web design to legal advice, we can answer your questions. We'll also be picking the best reader's tip and question to win prizes each month, so get them rolling in

Readers' questions are answered by our panel of experts. Send your query to faq@internet.emap.com

Richard Baguley is our associate editor. He'll answer your technical questions on everything from relational databases to digital signatures.

Mike Slocombe has designed sites for clients that include *TFI Friday*, Virgin Radio, the BBC and NCR. He also produces Urban 75, an irreverent online magazine. Mike will answer all your Web design queries.

Roger Gann is a freelance computer journalist. If you're having trouble with dial-up networking or your 56K modem isn't talking to your ISP, he's your man.

Michael Chissick is the head of Internet and IT law at Field Fisher Waterhouse. He'll be ruling on your legal problems.

Susan Costello is development director at Rufus Leonard, a brand and communications consultancy responsible for Web sites for Lloyds TSB, Royal Mail, and BT. She'll answer your technical Web site queries.

We regret that we are unable to answer any queries other than those that are printed in the magazine.

Logo to go go

Q I used to be a subscriber to Virgin Net's free ISP service, but after difficulties with connection speeds and other problems, I decided to switch to another ISP. But I can't get rid of the animated Virgin logo in the menu bar of Outlook Express and IE5. I've tried everything, including reinstalling both programs, but it's still there. My Internet-savvy friend has even tried looking in the registry for suspicious-looking icon settings, but they can't find anything obvious. Can you help?
Nina Jenkins
Nina@clara.co.uk

That pesky Virgin brand gets everywhere, doesn't it

A Roger Gann replies: Most ISPs will remove the animated Internet Explorer logo (the 'e' located in the top right-hand corner of your browser window) and replace it with their own logo – the standard IE logo spins to indicate Internet activity. To remove this customisation, you need to use the Registry Editor, REGEDIT. This is potentially dangerous, as a simple mistake could prevent Windows 9x from loading, so you must be extremely careful in the registry.

To restore the animated Internet Explorer logo, load REGEDIT (you can search for it using Find) and delete the BrandBitmap and SmBrandBitmap string values under the following registry key:

`HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\InternetExplorer\Toolbar`.

After you make this change, quit the Registry Editor and restart your computer.

To remove the 'InfoPane' panel in Outlook Express, delete the BodyBarPos and BodyBarPath values from the following registry keys:

`HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Identities\<SID>\Software\Microsoft\Outlook Express\5.0`
`HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Identities\<SID>\Software\Microsoft\Outlook Express\5.0`

<SID> is a number representing a user. Again, you'll need to restart your PC before the changes take effect.

If the prospect of using the Registry Editor frightens you, there's an alternative solution – you could try reinstalling Internet Explorer from our cover CD. You should see the following error message: 'You were previously running a customized version of Internet Explorer. Do you want to keep these customizations?'.

If you click Yes, the custom settings from the third-party version of Internet Explorer are retained. But if you click No, the custom settings are overwritten by the default settings for Internet Explorer.

Proposed merger

Q I'm building a mailing database using Excel and mail merging it into Word for mailshots. I want to publish this database on the Internet in a table or other format. The database has about 20 fields for around 300 entries. I want to use the Excel database to merge the data into an HTML table. Is there any software

Excel lets you save your database as HTML for the Web

Top reader's tip wins a MP3 player

If you use Internet Explorer 5, you might have noticed the Custom icons next to Items in your Favourites menu. If you haven't, try bookmarking the first page of the music site **www.harmony-central.com**. Unfortunately, this feature only works in IE5, but it's easy to do and could be the way to make your site stand out in a long list of favourites.

You need to create an icon to represent your site. It needs to have a height and width of 16 pixels and a colour depth of 16 colours. You can use any Windows bitmap program (including Paint), but if your program can't save out in the ICO format, save it as a BMP and rename the file with an ICO extension.

If you save the file with the name 'favicon.ico', you can simply upload the icon to the root directory of your site and it'll automatically be used when someone bookmarks a page in your site. If you want to use a name other than favicon.ico, you have to change your HTML. Add the following in between the <HEAD> and </HEAD> tags:

```
<LINK REL="SHORTCUT ICON"
HREF="www.adomain.com/aicon.ico">
```

Remember to change the HREF to the location of your icon. The advantage of this method is flexibility. By changing the <LINK>tag on specific pages to the locations of different icon files, you can use multiple icons throughout your site. For instance, you could create a separate icon for each section of your site.

Robert Masella
rmasella@yahoo.com

Thanks for the tip Robert. As the number of unique sites across the Web gets smaller and our lists of Favourites continues to grow, it's tougher for particular faves to stand out. Harmony Central has obviously got its act together.

Robert wins himself a MpMan, a palm-size portable MP3 player that lets you carry MP3 files anywhere you go and enjoy excellent digital quality, from Peoplesound.com, the UK and Europe's No 1 Free Music Download site. With over 2,000 of the hottest new acts, peoplesound.com is the way to discover great new music on the Net. Once you've selected and heard music you like, you can download and own the complete tracks absolutely FREE. Its easy and fun! Discover the best new music at...
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that can help me with this – but preferably not a WYSIWYG solution? Once the data's merged into the table I could tidy it to another format, but maintain the Excel database that could be used for the mailshots and HTML documents.
David Donoso
transtech.latino@virgin.net

A Susan Costello replies: Unless you've got a particularly old version of Excel, you should be able to save your files as HTML in the File menu. The HTML add≠in is not installed by default when you choose a typical installation during Setup. To install it, rerun Setup, click Add/Remove, and select the Web Page Authoring (HTML) option.

If your version of Excel doesn't let you do this, but your version of MS Word does, export the data as tab delimited text, open the resulting file in Word, convert the text to a table (in the Table menu) and save it as HTML.

Our gearbox isn't working

Q I'm responsible for the Web site at Hewland Engineering, the world's largest supplier of racing gearboxes. Our Web site has been in existence for over a year our site at or close to the top of the list. But if we search on things like 'motorsport gearbox' or 'racing transmissions', we don't appear anywhere on the list of results. We have appropriate META tags on all the pages, and the site description we've submitted has all the appropriate words in it. What are we doing wrong?
Kevin Lingard
kevin.l@hewland-engineering.co.uk

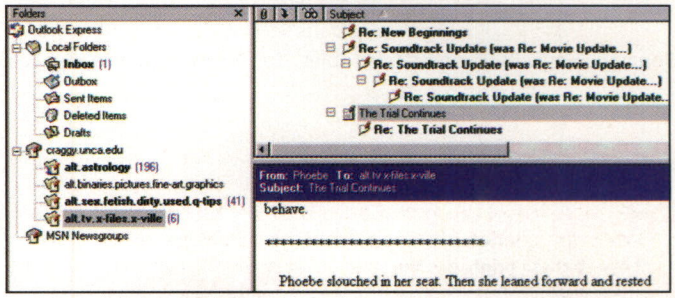
Submitting your site to search engines isn't enough – you need to design your site so they can pick it up easily

A Richard Baguley replies: You've put all the right words into the META tags of your Web pages, and the Web search engines are picking these up. But there are a few things you should consider, Kevin. First, search engines don't index pages on the contents of your META tags alone. They also look at the text on your pages, particularly your first page. On the first page on your site, there isn't really much for the search engines to pick up. If you look at the pages of sites that come top with the search terms you mention, many of them don't even have META tags – they're successful because they contain the words and phrases that people are searching for. Your site says you make things like gearboxes, but this is text in an image file, which search engines don't index. You should look at putting this on your index page as ordinary text, as well as making sure you add ALT tags to images that contain pertinent words.

You should also think about using phrases in your META tags, as this can help your search ranking. Instead of writing 'motorsport, gearbox, transmission', put in phrases that people might search for, like 'Racing transmission' or 'racing gearboxes'. This'll make your pages appear higher in the listings if someone types in these phrases. You can find some good pointers on how to make your page more search engine-friendly in the search engine submission tips section of Search Engine Watch at **www.searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/index.html**.

My brother's lost it

Q I'm having a lot of trouble after my brother changed some settings on our computer (with Windows 95). Our usual windows logon name (which has no password for auto logon) has been added to another one. Now, when we log on to the original and open Outlook Express 5, none of our 12 Mb of mail is there. Can you help? The POP3 settings and our address books are still there, but the folders and mail are gone. I've



A case of mistaken email identity can be sorted out by importing your old files

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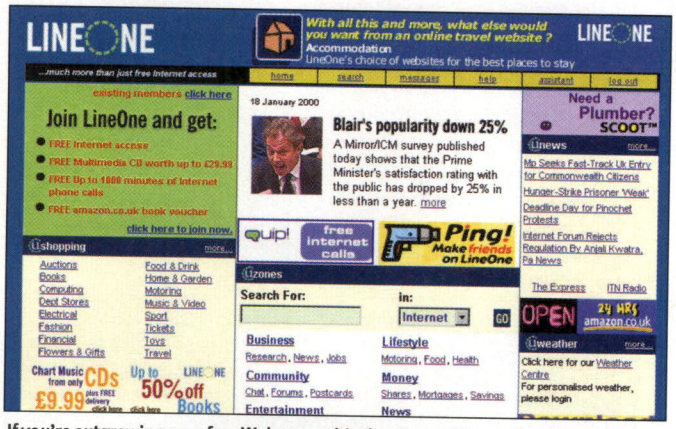
been able to find the mail files C:\program files\Outlook Express\Andrew Stowey (the user name), but the two don't seem to link together.
Richard Stowey
richardstowey@lineone.net

A Roger Gann replies: The missing data will still be on your PC, Richard. You can't see it because, by logging on as a new user, you've created a new user profile. Windows 9x is a great respecter of privacy, so it's only right that you can't see your mail if you've logged on as someone else. It could also be an Identities problem – this is a new feature with Outlook Express 5 that lets different users access their email from one PC, while ensuring a degree of privacy.

The quickest solution to your problem is to import the old mail data into your current identity. To do this, open Outlook Express and click File, Import. Select Messages from the drop-down list and choose Outlook Express 5. You're then taken through the process by an importation wizard. Select 'Import mail from an OE5 Store Directory' and browse to the folder containing your 'Andrew Stowey' DBX files.



If you're outgrowing your free Web space, it's time to consider professional hosting

Backward on Web forwarding

Q I'm still rather confused about Web hosting and domain names. I'm a freelance photographer using LineOne as an ISP (it's provided a good service and I have a good amount of Web space available). I'm building a Web site to act as a portfolio for my work, so I don't anticipate millions of hits, though I do have specialist subject matter that might be of interest to non-photographers and picture editors.

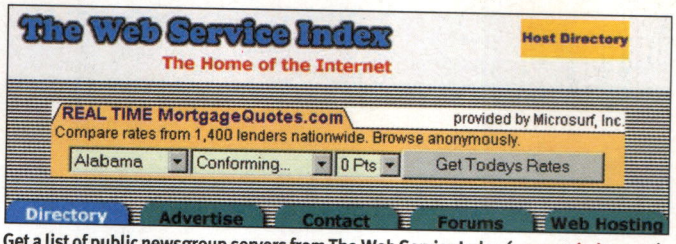
I think £100 a year for a dedicated hosting service is too much (at present), but I'd still like to use a proper domain name. Can you tell me about Web forwarding? Is it similar to the service that Bigfoot.com offers? Bigfoot, have proved invaluable over the past few years, keeping a continuity with my email address as I've changed ISPs.
George Logan
georgelogan@lineone.net

A Richard Baguley replies: Web forwarding works like this: someone types in your domain name (like **www.georgelogan.com**), and they're immediately and invisibly redirected to your Web site (at **www.lineone.net/users/georgelogan** or whatever). While this is cheaper than a full-blown hosting service, there are a few drawbacks. First, some users will find this disconcerting, and it might not work at all with some older browsers. You'll also have all of the limitations of your Web host, such as limited space and an inability to run your own scripts. This sort of thing makes your site look unprofessional when compared with others that run on a dedicated server, and this could be important if you're thinking about selling your photos, George.

Web hosting might not be as expensive as you think. Have a look at services like FreeNetNames (at **www.freenetnames.co.uk**), which will give you a .co.uk domain name for free (although there are some limitations to the service).

Desperate for news

Q I'm desperately trying to locate a NNTP News server that I can use for full news feeds. I connect to the Net via a leased line and I'd like to be able to subscribe (if necessary) to a news server. All of the ISPs I've contacted say you need to enter into their news server via the dial-up access portal, so I'd need to use a modem or lease the line from the ISP. The company that provides my current leased line is great – I have no problems with them, so why should I change? Using a modem seems a backward step when I have unlimited access to a 2Mb leased line. Do any providers grant access to their news servers direct? I'm fully prepared to pay for such a privilege, providing I can access the server from my existing connection.
Andrew Womsley
Andrew.Womsley@TSAADVET.co.uk



Get a list of public newsgroup servers from The Web Service Index (www.wsindex.com)

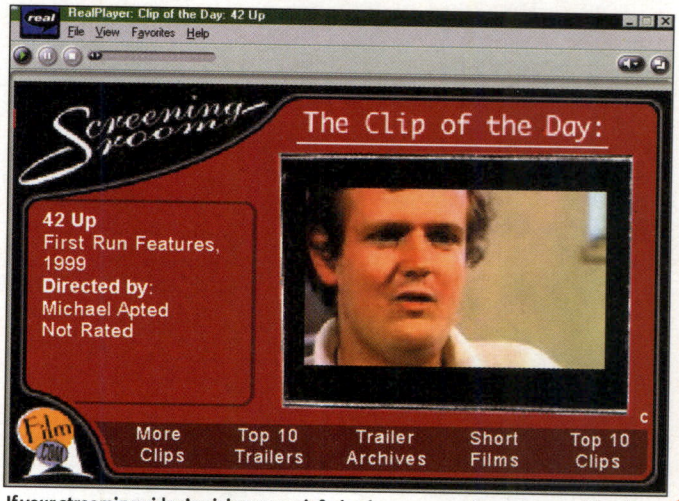
A Roger Gann replies: If you have a leased line, your ISP should be able to offer you an NNTP service. But you won't be able to subscribe to it if the network administrator of your company has decided that staff shouldn't have access to newsgroups – USENET is arguably the least relevant Internet service to businesses. This would mean IRC is also unavailable. Your first step is to speak to your network administrator, who'll probably refuse your request. Not being able to access the NNTP servers of other ISPs, unless you've got a connection to the appropriate ISP, is a common restriction – why should they give it away? You can get a limited list of public newsgroup servers at **www.wsindex.com**. Finally, there's nothing to stop you using Deja.com (**www.deja.com**), which effectively gives you Web access to USENET.

Problems with my buffering

Q I suffer constant rebuffering with Real Audio. Do you know how can I solve this?
Maxwell Hancock
m.j.hancock@hancock78.fsnet.co.uk

A Richard Baguley replies: There are a number of things that could cause rebuffering, such as a slow modem connection or a lack of memory. You can check for the first problem by trying another ISP and seeing if rebuffering persists. You should also upgrade your modem if you can – many manufacturers have released upgrades to let their modems receive data at 56Kbps using the V.90 standard. The RealPlayer requires a fair amount of memory, so if you don't have at least 32Mb, you should look at upgrading your computer by adding some more memory.

Another thing to check is the connection speed – if the RealPlayer program thinks you're running on a ISDN connection but you only using a 28.8Kbps modem, the RealServer will be trying to squeeze too much data through your modem connection. You can check this by going to Preferences on the view menu and clicking on the connection tab. The normal and



If your streaming video's giving you grief, check your upgrades and connection first

maximum bandwidth options should be set to the type of Internet connection you have.

Opera lover returns for answer

Q I was pleased to see you publish my Opera Lover question in the January issue of *Internet Magazine*. But I was disappointed to see you hadn't really answered it! I think I must have phrased my question so succinctly that it didn't explain the problem properly. I've already done as you suggested – set up the File Associations to relate ".HTM" to Opera.EXE, in Windows Explorer. This works for a little while, but then Netscape snatches them for itself and never gives them back. This even supersedes Internet Explorer Favourites. While running IE, if I pick a Favourite from the IE menu, Navigator launches itself and displays the page. I doubt that this is what Bill Gates intended! I want the following, simple arrangement – if I double-click an HTM in Windows Explorer, Opera should load as it's the fastest browser. But if I open a page from inside one of the bigger browsers, I want that application to display the page. It's not much to ask, surely?
Dave Wilcox
altcom@dial.pipe x.com

A Roger Gann replies: It might well be too much to ask, Dave. I think you're losing sight of the fact that a file type can only be associated with one application, so HTM can only be associated with one browser – your 'two-way' idea isn't feasible yet. But you can stop Navigator from grabbing the file association all the time. With Opera associated with the HTM extension, you should then load Netscape Navigator. It'll detect that it isn't registered to handle Internet Shortcuts and pop up a dialog box to advise you that it isn't your default browser. Click the No button to stop it becoming the default browser and check the 'Do not perform this check in the future' tick box. This'll permanently prevent Navigator from 'grabbing' the HTM file association. You can pull the same trick on Internet Explorer – right-click the Internet Explorer icon on the desktop and select Properties from the pop-up menu. Select the Programs tab and uncheck the 'Internet Explorer should check to see whether it's the default browser' tick box.

Using CSS for mouseovers

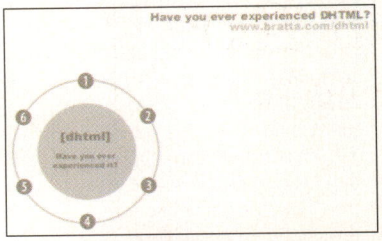
Q Can you tell me the reliable way to use CSS to get active links that change colour on mouseover? I can get the CSS bit working for IE, calling `OptionSelected = window .event.srcElement; OptionSelected.className= "clsHighlight"` **from a rollover.**

But the 'recommended' way with Netscape involves "document.write" and layers, which puts my text in the top left corner of the page, not in the middle of the page as I want. The result in IE is snazzy, crisper and faster than using image rollovers. But how can I get it to work for Netscape as well?
Dave Wilcox
Altcom@dial.pipex.com

A Susan Costello replies: Most sites use 'hover with CSS' for active links. You can specify it in the anchor section of the stylesheet like this:

```
a:hover {color: #thehexvalue
    ofyourhovercolour;}
```

This only works in IE, and I couldn't find a site that bothers to use DHTML layers to replicate the functionality in Netscape. Check out the following sites in both IE and Netscape – **www.altavista.com, www.msn.com, www.javascript.com** and **www.webreference.com**. If you want to use layers, you'll have to get your DHTML in order, which is no mean feat. Have a look at **www.bratta.com** for some wonderful ways of using it.



Great way to use DHTML from www.bratta.com

Top question wins a pager and Mini-Mail service

What does the future hold for Web design?

Q I've designed five Web sites, including three for a publishing company (www.cable-satellite.com) and two personal ones (www.acid-burn.ogk.uk) using MS FrontPage, I've been considering what to do next, as I feel that I've done pretty much everything with regards to HTML. I've started to learn asp, but I haven't achieved any great progress as I'm not that good at programming. My father says the future is ColdFusion (what is this?) and that I should consider looking into WAP. I'm becoming increasingly confused about what the future holds, and I was hoping you -as the best magazine about the Internet - could give me some advice. Most of what I've done is quite basic and I want to create some really good interactive sites, but I'm not sure what route to follow.
Ross Bowser
Rpb@charity.vfree.com

Caption

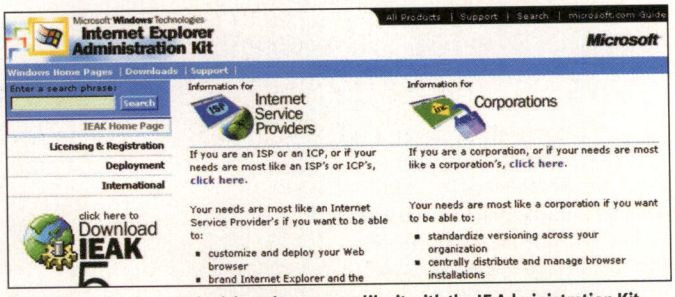
A Mike Slocombe replies: ColdFusion is a Web application server that uses a tag-based server scripting language for programming Web applications. It integrates with a broad range of back office and Internet technologies (such as XML and databases), and has become popular because of its flexibility and its ease of implementation. You can find out more from **www.allaire.com**.

WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) is a completely different beast. It's an emerging technology designed to bring Web browsing capabilities to mobiles, pagers and handheld computers. You can find the full technical specification at **www.oasis-open.org/cover/wap-wml.html**. You'll find details of the WAP forum at **www.wapforum.org**.

I'd hate to predict the future of the Web, Ross, but I'd suggest that in the workplace, specialisation has become the overriding market trend. A few years ago it was easy for designers to take care of all aspects of Web design, but in the face of new technologies and increasingly complex database requirements, many businesses have decided to focus on their own area of expertise.

The Mini-Mail service is ideal for dial up Internet users. With no need to keep checking to see if e-mails have arrived, subscribers are able to make great savings. There is no need to change an existing email account as Mini-Mail can be used with all POP3 accounts. Mini-Mail can also check other email accounts and notify the pager of specific emails waiting in those mailboxes.

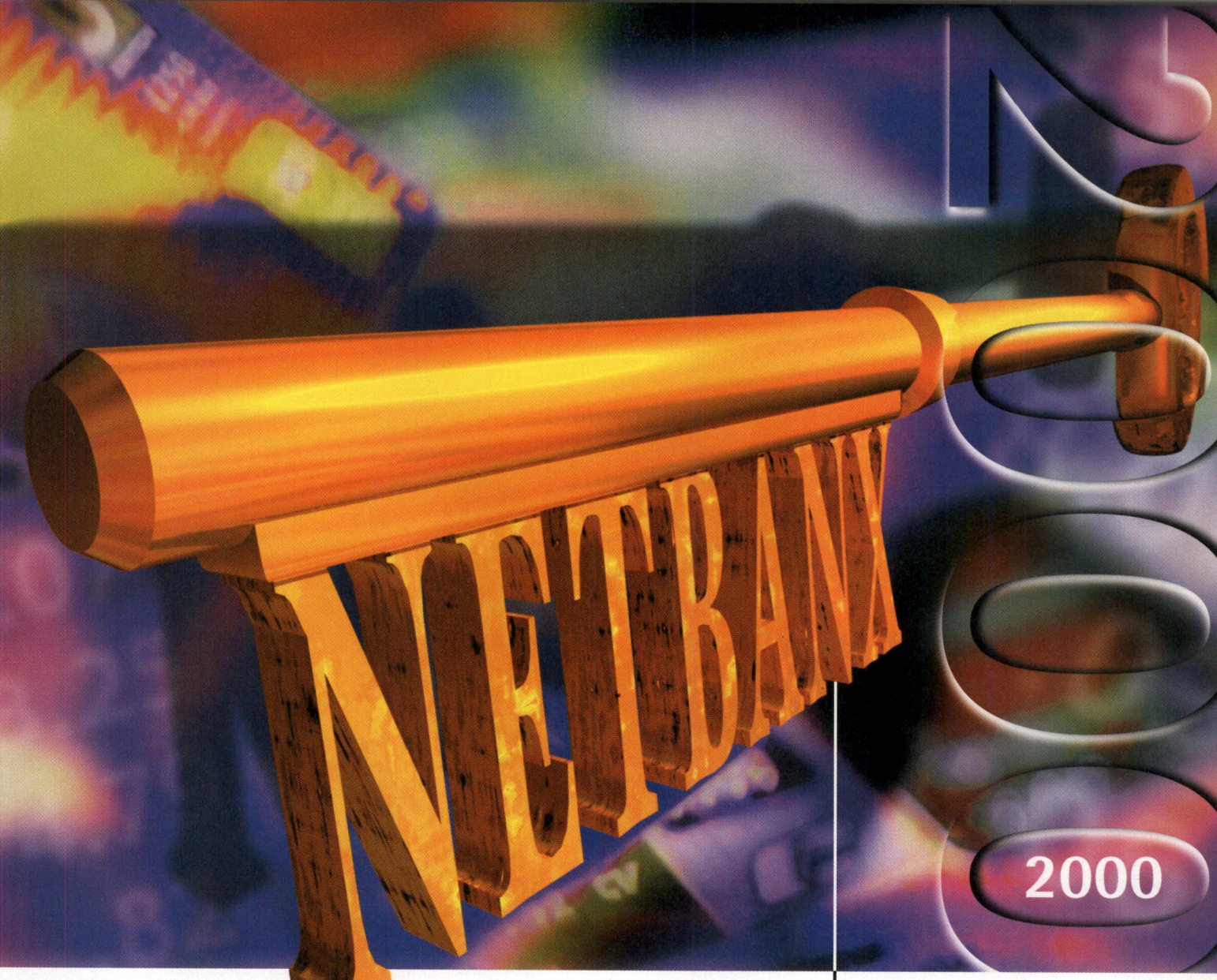
The three month e.one email notification service costs £49.99 a year, or £15 a quarter, and lets you receive up to 30 messages a day via the Net and 50 messages a month via the bureau. The e.four package costs £99.99 and includes free email notification for three months, a free Web-based email account, free Net access and free software to send pager messages direct from a PC.



Get Internet Explorer to look just the way you like it with the IE Administration Kit

Changing my Outlook

Q How can I change the address of the Web site that loads into the bottom info pane of Outlook Express 5? Every ISP I sign up with puts its own page in there, but it'd be more useful if I could choose my Favourite page, or



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design my own page with links to my favourite sites. Can you tell me how to do this?
Richard Bowden
rich@hitdesign.net

A Roger Gann replies: The easiest way to do this is to get hold of the IE Administration Kit, which is used by ISPs to apply their branding to the Internet Explorer suite of programs. You can download it, free of charge, from www.microsoft.com/windows/ieak/en/default.asp – it's a 3.6Mb download.

Domain names live on

Q If a domain is registered in your name and you die, can you pass it on to someone else in your will? The registration company I asked said that once the person registered is dead, the domain is free again for re-registry. Is this correct?
Rosamund Snow
rosamund_snow@hotmail.co

Nominet.uk

A Michael Chissick replies: The rules which regulate the ability to pass on a domain name will vary between each of the domain name registries. Nominet, which is the authority in the UK and deals with .co.uk domain names, will let you leave a domain name in your will.

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The helpline deals with dial-up and browser queries, but it can't answer questions about corporate network connections.

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Legal brief: The birth of e-patents

As business methods are now patentable in the US, Michael Chissick explains why e-businesses should consider looking across the Atlantic to increase the legal protection for their intellectual property rights

One of the keys to the success of Amazon.com is the user-friendliness of its 'shopping basket' method of ordering items from its Web site. Amazon recently obtained a US patent to protect the method. Other e-businesses with similar attractive Web site features should consider doing the same.

Historically, patents have not been available for business methods and computer programs in either the US or Europe. Instead, programs have been protected by copyright law. Although copyright protection is cheaper and easier to obtain – it arises automatically upon the creation of the program/method and does not need to (and in fact cannot) be registered – a patent provides much stronger protection. A patent provides an effective monopoly on an invention. Ownership is easier to prove because it is registered and, unlike with copyright, one can sue for breach of a patent without having to prove copying.

If you've got a great feature on your site, as good as Amazon's shopping basket, you might want to consider a patent to protect it

For these reasons, many companies have tried to register their 'inventions' as patents rather than having to rely on copyright protection. They continue to be unsuccessful in the UK. For example, in 1997, Fujitsu sought a patent for software which helped a chemist design new chemical compounds. The Patents Act 1977 specifically excludes computer programs from the type of inventions which can be patented unless there is a technical contribution in addition to the program. The Court of Appeal could find no such additional contribution in Fujitsu's development.

Until recently, the US courts had the same approach. But there has been a shift in their attitude. A US bank has been allowed to patent a software product which did little more than transform monetary data from one form to another. Suddenly business methods have become patentable in the US. It is highly unlikely that the bank could register the same software product as a patent in the UK or elsewhere in the EU.

On the face of it, this development in US law would only seem to be of interest to banks and other financial institutions which rely heavily on mathematical processes. But what Amazon has done in obtaining a patent for its shopping basket shows that it may also be exploited by e-businesses to gain increased protection for web site systems or features.

It would also seem to be relevant only to US companies but that is not the case. Although a US patent will not provide protection in other countries, it will provide a legal weapon in what is, after all, the epicentre of e-commerce. The registration system for a US patent is not cheap but it may be a valuable investment for an e-business with a distinctive system which it is keen to protect.

Michael Chissick is head of the Internet and On-Line Law Group at City law firm Field Fisher Waterhouse. He can be contacted at mpc@ffwlaw.com

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How to add 3D images to your site

With a little ingenuity you can add another dimension to your Web pages with a window into a 3D world. Steve Patient shows you the latest techniques for creating 3D images for your site

Web pages were never intended to handle three-dimensional shapes and objects, but then they weren't meant to cope with sound, animation and video either. A 3D object is more complex than a flat image and has hidden depths. For instance, a picture of a door is static, but a 3D image of a door might let you open it. If the 3D information extends internally, you might be able to go through the door, find the family silver and abscond with it. To do this, your 3D object will need a lot more data than a simple 2D image.

It'd be great to have a 3D object that had real world properties, but this is impossible. For a start, the object must be displayed on a flat screen, so you won't be able to touch it. But you shouldn't overcomplicate the process of creating effective 3D for the Web – more congruence with a real object or scene requires more data and processing power.

Unless your 3D object is running on autopilot, such as a demo or an exhibit, your visitor will want a degree of control over it. How you provide them with this control depends on the type of 3D technology you use.

Faking it

The ultimate in 3D is fully immersed virtual reality. But why should you pay the high performance price for VR if you can fake it? Animated GIFs are the easiest way to get 3D objects on your site.

They let you run simple movies with control over individual frames. The combination of a 256 colour limit, transparency, and the ability to use image frames containing only the changed part of the image, means you can make animated GIFs small yet impressive.

An ordinary GIF can't be interactive. You can add a minimum level of interactivity by using JavaScript to detect a cursor and load the animation, but you might as well use some JavaScript to download and run a sequence of frames. This lets you offer visitors a higher degree of control.

You can use PaintShop Pro (from **www.jasc.com**), Photoshop (**www.adobe.com**) and a host of dedicated utilities to create animated GIFs. Alchemy's GIF Construction Set (**www.mindworkshop.com**) is particularly useful.

Flashing it

Any other graphic technology that lets you display a sequence of frames can be used to fake 3D, but few are as small as animated GIFs and, apart from AVI files, you often need a plug-in to show them. Most people object to having to download a plug-in to see a Web page.

But Macromedia claims 88 per cent of browsers already have Flash installed on Windows, Macs, Linux and other platforms. Unlike GIFs and movies, Flash animations are based on vector graphics, which let you build small, fast and scaleable images from a mathematical description. You can find Flash creation tools on the Shockwave site (**www.shockwave.com**).

Flash graphics aren't interactive though, and you can't use the Flash to create true 3D objects. Macromedia's Shockwave lets you create interactive Web pages, but it isn't easy to work with, and Shockwave applets tend to be rather large. The program's more useful if you have a fast connection to the Net, but there are other Web technologies that get closer to the 3D dial-up ideal.

Getting real

A basic requirement of 3D is the ability to move around a three-dimensional scene, such as a house at an online estate agent. An elegant solution for situations where you want to look but not touch is Apple's QuickTime VR (formerly Quicktime 3D).

Your interaction on this site is limited to touring, but combining QuickTime VR with QuickTime 4's support for streaming video means you can download the requested view on the fly, which dramatically improves response times.

You can find links to some great examples of QuickTime VR at **www.quicktime.com**, as well as information on the tools you'll need to create your own examples.

You might be wondering why the technology used for online 3D games isn't used on Web pages. This is because the game engine – along with hundreds of Megabytes of information about the 3D world –

A short history of VRML

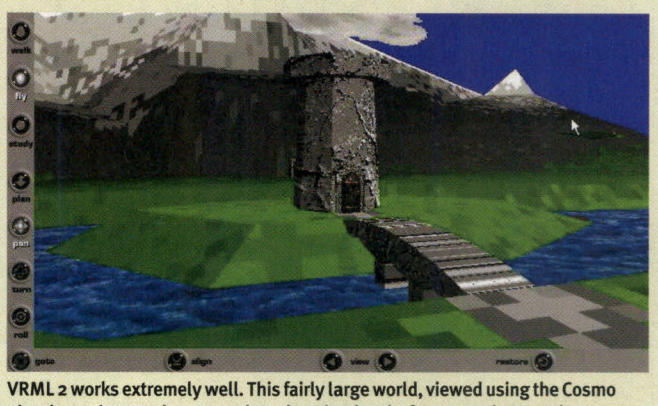
VRML 1 appeared in 1994, followed by VRML 2 in 1996, based on Silicon Graphics' Moving Worlds format. The standard is now VRML97, with VRML-ng being considered. Check out **www.vrml.org** for more.

VRML 2 is the most common 3D format, but it's so different from the initial version that many VRML viewers don't support both. Get convertors from **http://home.hiwaay.net/~crispen/vrmlworks/convert.html**.

VRML 2 supports interaction and animation, among other great features. Nothing better has appeared for 3D world work. Most 3D modelling programs will export VRML, but supported features vary. Caligari's TrueSpace is one of the more popular VRML packages, but you'll find dozens of great tools and utilities available, ranging from freeware to expensive software. Many CAD programs also export VRML.

A major problem for VRML is the confused state of VRML plug-ins and browsers. Some choke on minor code differences, fail to support basic features or previous VRML standards, interact badly with each other, crash a lot or are otherwise irritating.

Many VRML world sites specify a VRML browser or plug-in. Cosmo (**www.cosmosoftware.com/products/player**) is one of the more widely supported browsers. Viscape supports VRML 2 well, but the Cortona VRML client is excellent – you'll find it at **www.parallelgraphics.com/htm/en**. You'll also find a VRML screensaver on the site.



VRML 2 works extremely well. This fairly large world, viewed using the Cosmo plug-in, took around 20 seconds to download and a few seconds to render

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is installed on every computer involved. This means only a small amount of this information, such as movement and collisions, is exchanged over the Net. 3D game engines don't lend themselves to producing 3D Web content.

Stop, go, stop, go

This is where 3D on the Web gets a little strange. Five years ago there was a huge excitement about 3D objects in Web pages. The biggest and fastest bandwagon was VRML – Virtual Reality Modelling Language.

3D Novelties

You don't have to know anything about 3D design or programming to use simple but effective examples on your Web pages. You can get a surprising number of free Java applets and utilities. Most of these use your own images as textures on simple VRML objects. A Java applet manipulates the finished object in your Web pages.

At the top end is Canoma (**www.canoma.com**). You can build surprisingly effective worlds simply by pinning photographs to primitive shapes, such as cones and cubes, then grouping them. The effects are dramatic and you won't need many design skills.

Canoma isn't cheap, but there are many freebies using the same basic techniques. Intel (**www.intel.com/home/funstuff/webapplets**) has some great, free 3D applets complete with example pages and usage instructions.

Tristar's page (**www.tristar.com**) has incredibly cheap utilities, and gives you demo versions to play with. Tristar's 3D ImageCube 2, for instance, comes with a program to build the cube for you. It also lets you add captions and different hyperlinks to each face. It even optimises the images for you to reduce page download times.Finally, all the major Java applet repositories include various, usually non-interactive, 3D effect generators.

Trivista's Imagecube 3D has a wizard front end which makes the creation of interactive 3D cubes a drag and drop process. This one took 30 seconds

VRML 1 offered extremely limited interaction, but more serious was a lack of browser support, clunky viewers and even clunkier VRML objects. There was also a general feeling that the effects Web page authors were seeking to achieve would be better managed by more basic technologies, such as animated GIFs.

Exporting VRML in most programs is designed to produce 3D objects and scenes, but if you say "VRML" to a Web author, you get reactions ranging from indifference to belly laughs. It's quite an elegant language though, and it still underlies most of the current 3D solutions – just don't say VRML out loud.

More 3D solutions

Some time ago Netscape proposed a 3D technology called Live3D. But while the Live3D API (Application Programming Interface) is public, and although all Netscape browsers after version 2 support Live3D, it was never taken up by Microsoft or other serious Web players.

Live3D lets Java or JavaScript interact with a VRML scene using LiveConnect. Netscape has more details on its site (**www.netscape.com/eng/live3d**), but the links to the Live3D browser plug-in and examples appear to be broken.

Superscape's Viscape is far more successful 3D technology, because it grew out of an existing gaming and multimedia technology. You can find more details at **www.superscape.com**.

Large scale 3D

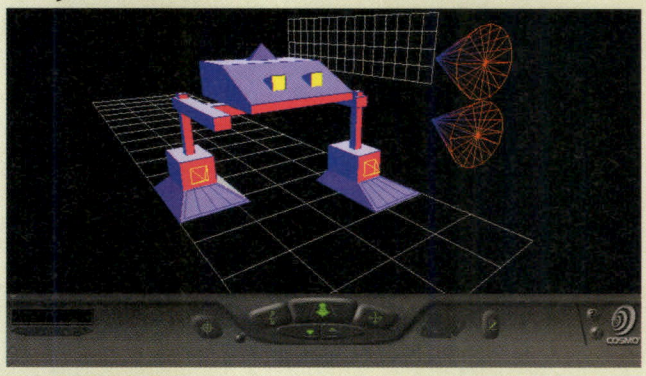
Viscape comes as a plug-in for Netscape and as an ActiveX control for IE4/5. There are three versions – VRML97, SVR (Superscape Virtual Reality) and Universal, which can handle the other two versions. They're all free, but rather large – the Universal download is 6.3Mb. In practice, it's an embedded VRML browser capable of running as a standalone application.

Once installed, Viscape works well. Viscape windows in Web pages come complete with controls that let you move your viewpoint and interact with the scene. The scenes themselves are too large for a dial-up download, though, and you don't get support for VRML 1 objects.

Viscape works best on intranets, or if you have a fast, permanent Net connection. This is why it remains a niche technology, despite being relatively simple to work with. You won't see it unless you look for it – pop across to the Virtual Worldwide Web (**www.vwww.com**) for links to

Building 3D Web pages with Shout 3D

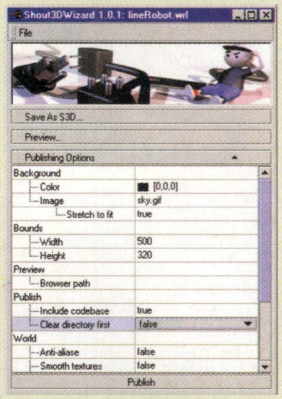
Step 1



This VRML 2 animated dancing robot looks neat, as displayed by the default Cosmo VRML browser in IE4, but most browsers don't have VRML support

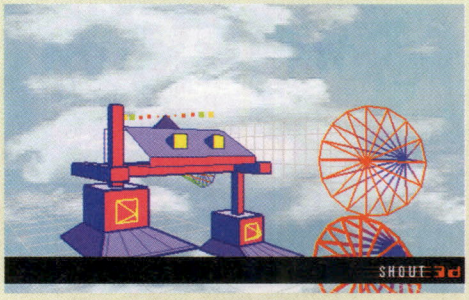
Step 2

The Shout3D wizard takes a compliant VRML 2 file. You can use it to change things like the background image (and its colour), the display size and the Java applet

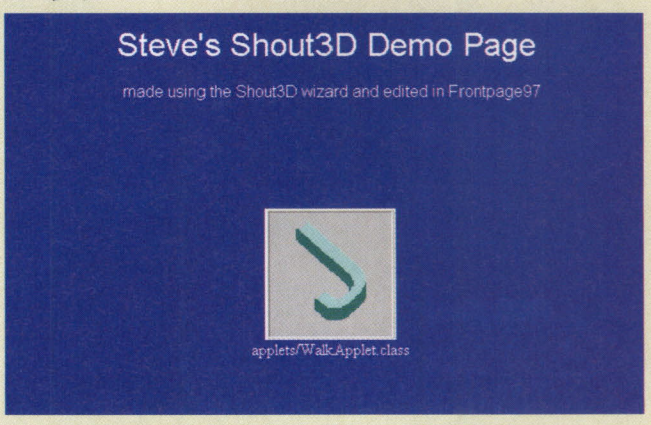


Step 3

You can now preview it locally in your browser. The Shout3D wizard builds the basic Web page for you, ready to import into your favourite Web editor



Step 4



Once you've edited the basic file, in this case using FrontPage97, you can upload it to your Web site

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around 600 pages that use Viscape to produce 3D for the Web.

Superscape Professional services designs 3D Viscape worlds. You can also buy a variety of Viscape authoring tools, such as VRT, Webscape 3D and Do 3D.

Programming Web 3D

The broadest 3D Web solution is a programming language. Java is the obvious choice because most browsers, even the latest versions of Opera, support it.

But there are problems for Java enthusiasts. For a start, you need to address textures a pixel at a time and Vanilla Java is too slow for anything more than simple 3D demos. But to prove it's possible to do it all by hand, check out Angelica (**www.angelica.dk/english/teknologi/java/3d**).

Fortunately, you can choose from a good variety of Java 3D libraries – a good starting point is Sun's Java site (**www.developer.java.sun.com**).

The official Java 3D was released in April 1999. It's a new set of Java classes, with public APIs and source code designed for 3D display and manipulation. You'll find more details, plus an FAQ section, at Sun's Web site (**www.java.sun.com/products/java-media/3D**).

Java 3D works by mapping Java 3D API calls to existing low level 3D graphic technologies on the various platforms for speed. It runs using OpenGL on Solaris and Direct3D on Windows. Sun intends third parties to provide implementations for other platforms.

Despite the hype, you won't find many examples of Web pages using Java 3D. This is probably because Java 3D doesn't specify a file format for 3D objects, which is destined to cause endless problems.

Elegy to elegance

A more serious objection to using Java 3D is you can get a more elegant solution that works better with dial-up connections. Shout3D (**www.shout3d.com**) uses a small, 100k Java applet to handle the Web page display. This means it doesn't need a plug-in to work, just a Java-enabled Web browser.

Shout3D works brilliantly, and it should cause a resurgence of 3D on the Web this year. But it does suffer from the problems caused by VRML.

While it claims to support any VRML 2 or VRML97 world, it fails if proprietary extension nodes, such as Box, Sphere, Cylinder or Cone geometries are used, as well as failing to cope with unusual file data locations for things like route information.

You need to import and re-export most VRML 2 or VRML97 files in a 3D package to standardise them for Shout3D. Not many of the free VRML objects that you can download from the Web will work. But 3D is a new program, so this situation should improve. The bottom line is that there's a 3D Web solution for everyone – and about time too.

Conclusion

Web 3D has been, quite rightly, left to languish by for the last five years. Vendors have finally accepted the limitations imposed by a dial-up connection and produced workable solutions. Of these, QuickTime VR and Shout3D stand out.

You'll need to do a fair amount of work to create effective 3D objects from scratch, but any Web author can now make use of 3D objects and effects on their sites, and you'll see more of them appearing on the Net.

3D Resources

The Web 3D Consortium
www.web3d.org

3D file formats
www.cica.indiana.edu/graphics/3D.objects.html

Java 3D Developer site
http://developer.java.sun.com/developer/earlyAccess/java3d.html

3D Web graphic technology links
www.stars.com/Authoring/Graphics/3d

Some VRML modeller program suggestions
home.hiwaay.net/~crispen/vrmlworks/model_obj.html

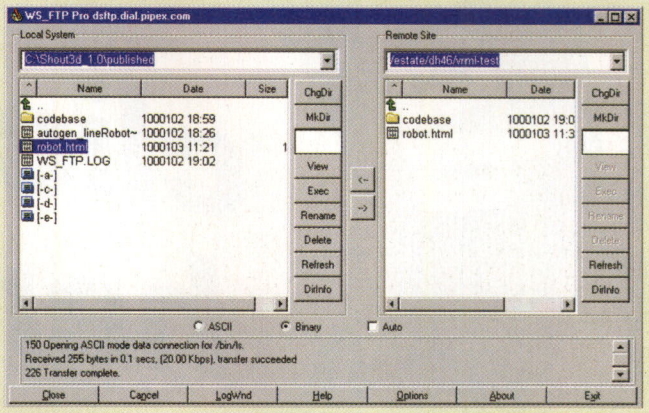
New worlds to explore
www.3dsite.com/n/sites/3dsite/whatsnew.html

Some neat free VRML objects
www.construct.net/worlds

UK VR-SIG 3D Object Archive
www.dcs.ed.ac.uk/~objects/vrml.html

Building 3D Web pages with Shout 3D

Step 5



You then upload the edited file, complete with the Java classes necessary to make it all work, using WS_FTP Pro – but you can use any method you like

Step 6

And here's the finished page working perfectly over a dial-up link. It'll take your visitors around 40 seconds to display from scratch, including downloading the Java

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How to set up Web videoconferencing

Cheap Web cams mean virtually anyone can afford to use the Internet for videoconferencing across the globe. Richard Baguley shows you how to talk to, and see, far away friends and relatives for the cost of a local call

Here's a tempting offer – how would you like to be able to talk to, and see, your family and friends around the world for the cost of a local phone call? It sounds like a con, but it isn't – you can do it by using the Internet for videoconferencing.

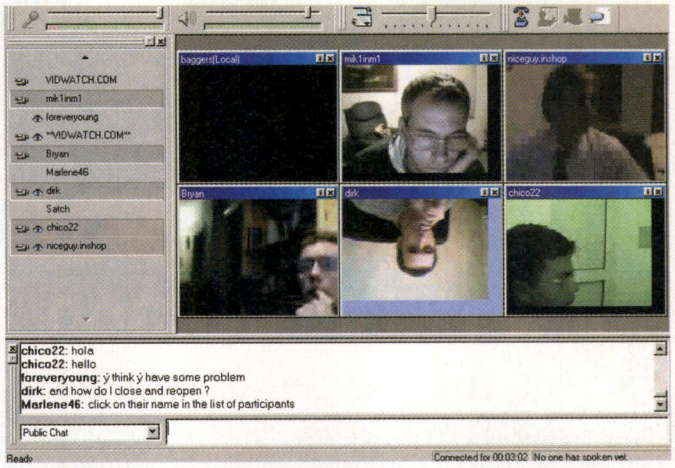
The idea of using cameras to send and receive video over telephone lines and the Internet has been around for many years, and has been widely used by international companies to connect their offices around the globe. But this sort of system is now available to the home user thanks to two things – the falling cost of the equipment and improvements in compression technology.

A camera you could use for videoconferencing used to cost hundreds or even thousands of pounds. You also needed extra equipment, such as a video capture card, and a faster-than-average Net connection. But you can now pick up a PC compatible video camera for less than £50, and a standard 56k modem is fast enough to send and receive your audio and video.

The increasing speed of computers has also helped to bring videoconferencing to the home user. To be sent over the Internet, your video and audio has to be heavily compressed, which takes a lot of computing power. But these days a computer suitable for videoconferencing will only cost you a few hundred pounds. So videoconferencing is finally within the reach of the online masses.

The downside

Don't throw out your telephone yet, though, because there is a downside to videoconferencing. The Internet's speed is unreliable, so the quality of audio and video you get with videoconferencing isn't outstanding. The video window is typically only 100 pixels wide, and the compression used to reduce the size of your data when it's sent means the quality is often rather poor. This can be exacerbated by a slow Internet connection or congestion on the Net, giving poor audio quality and video that only manages one frame every few seconds.



A reflector (a central server) lets several different people connect together at once

Cheap video cameras, such as Creative's WebCam III, put videoconferencing within the reach of every computer user

But despite this, these systems are cheaper than international phone calls and let you see the people you're talking to. It might be a choppy, low quality image, but imagine being able to see the look on your nephew's face when he opens up the present you sent him.

What you need

To start videoconferencing, there are a few things you'll need:

- A reasonably fast PC or Mac with an Internet connection
- A video camera
- Videoconferencing software
- A soundcard
- A microphone
- Speakers

To use videoconferencing, most manufacturers recommend a minimum of a Pentium-based PC running at a speed of at least 100MHz and with 16Mb of memory. Mac users will need a PowerPC with a similar amount of memory.

Next up is the video camera. If your PC or Mac has a USB port, this is the easiest way to connect your camera. It also means you can buy any USB computer video camera, such as the QuickCam Express (around £40) or Creative's WebBlaster (around £70). The choices are more limited if you don't have a USB port, but cameras such as the Eyestar 2 (around £30) can be plugged into the parallel port. Alternatively, for around £40, you can get an expansion card that adds a USB port to your PC.

To talk over the Internet, you'll need a soundcard (this is what the microphone and speakers plug into) – they're included with most PCs. Alternatively, you can pick up a cheap soundcard for less than £30. You'll also need a microphone and speakers - these will be included with most soundcards. If you're planning to use the system a lot, it might be worth investing in a combination headphone and microphone device. You can get these for under £30 from most computer shops, and they'll avoid problems with feedback from the microphone picking up sound from the speakers.

You'll also need software to send and receive your audio and

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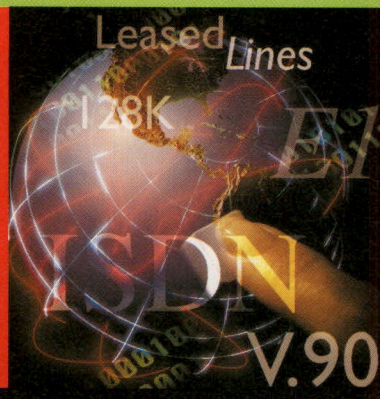

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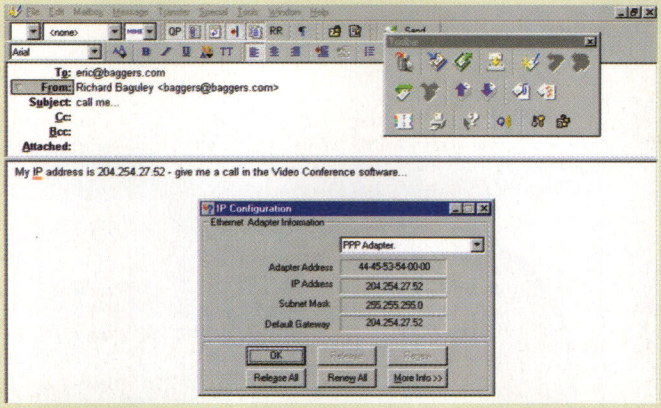
A typical video conference session

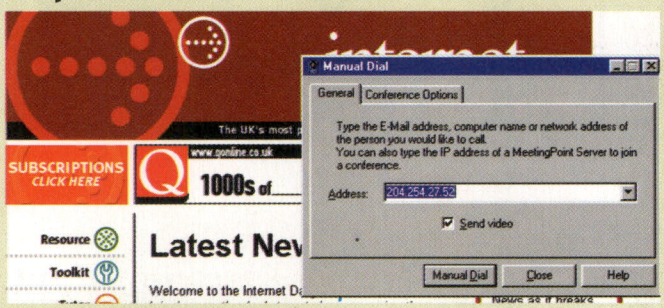
In this example, one end of the videoconference is using a PC running CU-SeeMe Pro software, while the other is using a PC with Microsoft's NetMeeting 3

Step 1



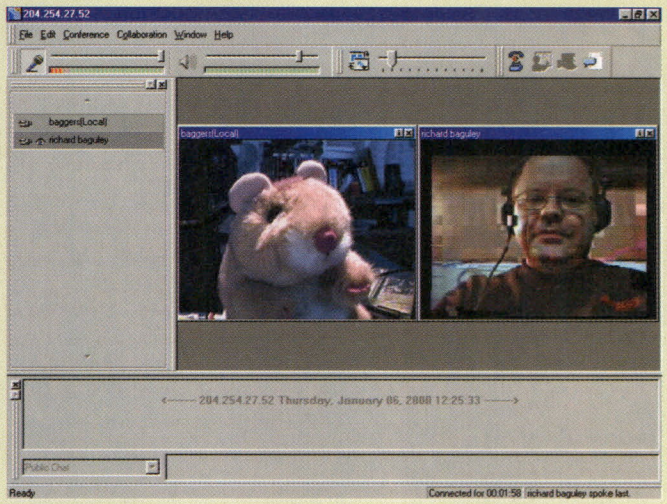
At an agreed time, both people go online. One person checks their IP address and emails this to the other.

Step 2



The recipient enters this IP address into their software to make the connection. This is done in CuSeeMe by using the manual dial utility, but it's done differently in other programs. NetMeeting, for instance, lets you enter the IP address direct into the New Call window. This can also be done using directory services, where one person posts their details to the directory and the other searches for them.

Step 3



The connection is made – both of you can see your own video and the remote video, as well as hear each other thanks to the microphones and speakers attached to both computers. As you can see, the preview you get of your own video differs somewhat from what the other person sees.

video, but this is usually bundled with the camera. It's also included with Windows 98 in the form of NetMeeting, a free program from Microsoft. If you don't have this, you can download it from **www.microsoft.com/netmeeting**. The latest version is 3.01. There are alternatives you can use, such as CuSeeMe Pro. See our labs test of Internet Phone software in the September 1999 issue of *Internet Magazine* for a roundup of options.

Standards are a good thing

Once upon a time, if you wanted to videoconference with someone, you had to use the same software, because the different programs sent and received data differently. Thankfully, this isn't the case any more, thanks to industry standard H.323, which is recognised by most recent videoconferencing software. So you can happily use NetMeeting on a PC to videoconference with your friend using CuSeeMe Pro on a Mac.

Finding the way home

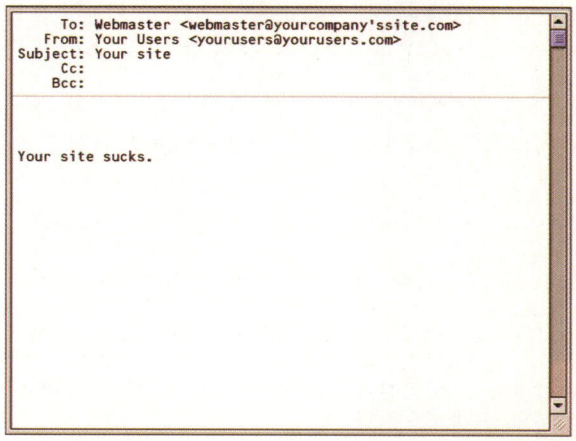
Once you've got all the kit, you'll need to work out how to find the person you want to talk to. This is a bit more complex than you might think, because of how the Internet works. Whenever you dial up and connect, your ISP gives you a unique number (called an IP address) that identifies your computer on the Internet. This number is usually different every time you connect, and there's no way to predict what it's likely to be – the only way to tell is to check once you're online.

There are several different ways to deal with this problem. The most common method is to use an Internet Locator Server (ILS). If you log onto these servers (through your videoconferencing software) and give them your details, they add you to a list of users. Other people can then search this list for your name, and click on it to start videoconferencing.

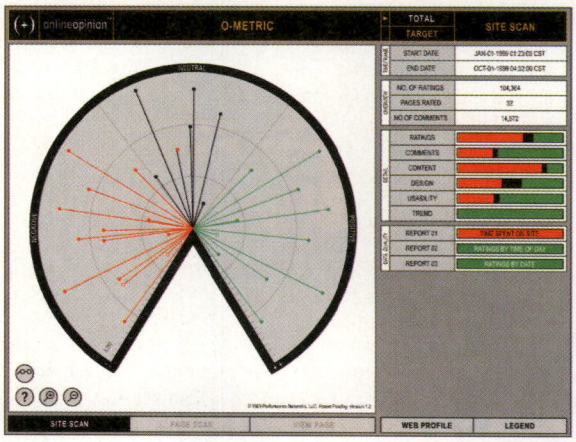
So all you have to do is give someone the name of the ILS server you use – many ISPs run these servers for their customers. The downside of this is that your name appears on a public server that anybody can access, so you could get nuisance calls from people who are just looking for someone to chat with. And the last thing you want when you're expecting Auntie Doris from Australia is a man from Didcot with no underwear on.

The second solution is to use Instant Messaging software such as ICQ or MSN messenger. Both of these let you connect to someone else if you know their details, without having to know their IP address. The signs are that this will be the preferred method. Microsoft has chosen to use its MSN Messenger service as the preferred method of connection in version 3 of its NetMeeting software, instead of using ILS (which seems odd since it created the ILS system in the first place). All you have to do is find the person you're looking for and tell them you want to start videoconferencing. MSN Messenger is directly integrated into NetMeeting 3. You'll find an excellent guide on how to use NetMeeting with ICQ at **www.netmeet.net/buddy.asp**.

The final solution is a simple one. When you want to conference with a friend, you arrange a time with them in advance, by phone or email. When the time comes, you go online, find your IP address and



this is feedback



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Videoconferencing with only one camera

Sometimes you might only want, or be able to make, a one-way connection. For instance, one side of the conference might have a PC that is incompatible with video cameras, or one person might only have Net access via a cybercafé. But you can still make a one-way video connection without having to install any software or hardware on the computer that's used to view the video.

Programs like Surveyor Corporations' WebCam32 let you set up a Web cam that can be accessed by any computer with a Web browser. This is easy to do – you run the software on the computer that has the camera attached, and create a Web page that includes JavaScript supplied with the software. This connects direct to the Web cam software and grabs a new image as often as the bandwidth allows. With a good Internet connection, this can give you a video image that runs at 5-8 frames a second. If you're using a modem, it won't go beyond one or two frames a second.

This'll only let you see, not hear, what's going on, but WebCam32 also lets you send audio and even text chat, although all of this will need more bandwidth. See **www.surveyorcorp.com** for more details.

email it to your friend. You then launch your videoconferencing software and wait for them to connect to your system. While you're doing this, they type the IP address you've supplied into their videoconferencing software and connect directly to you without having to bother searching on a server using extra software.

Making the connection

Whichever method you use to find the person you want to call, the process for making a connection is usually the same. If you leave the videoconferencing software running and someone calls you, a small window will appear showing you the name of the person calling, and two buttons. One lets you accept the call. The other hangs up without answering, which is useful for getting rid of the occasional nuisance caller.

If you decide to accept the call, screens will appear which let you watch the video and hear the audio. These might take a few seconds to appear as the two computers decide how to send and receive the data between them.

You'll notice a significant delay in the audio and video. There are two reasons for this – the process of compressing the video and audio takes a short time, and the data takes time to travel over the Net. This means you can't realistically have a normal conversation (unless you live near each other and you've both got high speed connections). Instead, you end up with the sort of conversation you have over a radio link, where one person speaks, then stops and waits for the other person to speak. It's a little bit weird at first, but you'll soon get used to it.

The pros and cons of videoconferencing

There are still some drawbacks to videoconferencing over the Internet. But the system does work, and it's a godsend if you have family or friends that live abroad, because it's far cheaper than normal phone calls. If you have a permanent Internet connection at both ends, it's free, so you could leave it running 24 hours a day for a real insight into the lives of your loved ones overseas.

Want to know more?

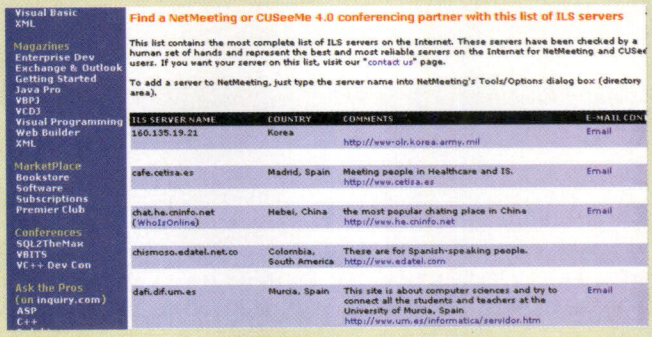
Check out the following sites for useful information and further details on videoconferencing

Microsoft NetMeeting

It's rather biased, but this site gives you lots of good information on how to set up and use Microsoft's own videoconferencing software.

www.microsoft.com/windows/netmeeting

NetMeeting Zone

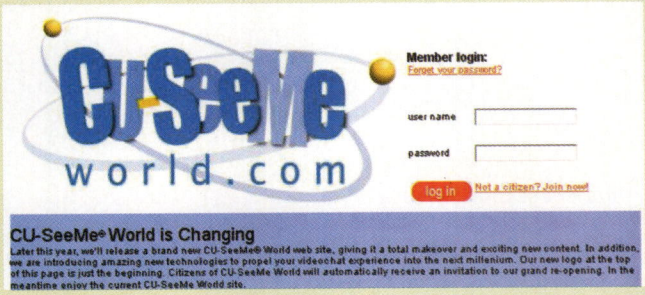


The NetMeeting Zone contains a huge list of ILS servers that you can use to find people to conference with.

This is another site that covers Microsoft's NetMeeting software, but there's plenty of information here for users of other software. You'll also find a huge list of ILS servers all over the world, which could be useful if you're trying to find one to use.

www.netmeet.net

CuSeeMe World



CuSeeMe is another popular program for videoconferencing from White Pine software. This site includes a community where you can find other CuSeeMe users to chat with. There's also a good section on common problems with the programs.

www.cuseeme.com

Videoconferencing software

This site has links to lots of different videoconferencing programs, as well as to other good sites.

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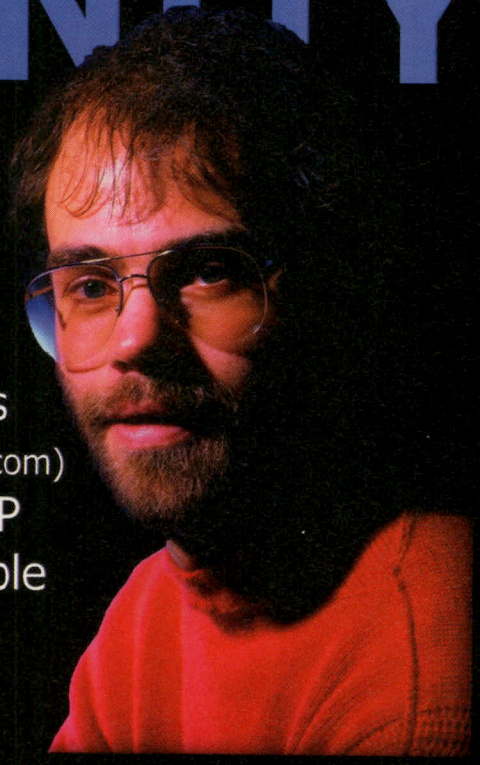

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Protect yourself from active code

Programming languages and scripts improve your browsing by adding functionality to the Internet, but they also provide serious threats to your system. Kevin Townsend tells you how to protect yourself from the Web's malicious active code

The US Department of Defense is considering a ban on JavaScript on its Web servers because of the security dangers it can pose. JavaScript, together with the more powerful Java and ActiveX, can introduce active code from the Web onto your computer.

Active code can be actively good and actively bad, so you need to consider the value and dangers that are inherent in the languages of Java, JavaScript, Visual Basic Script (VBS) and ActiveX.

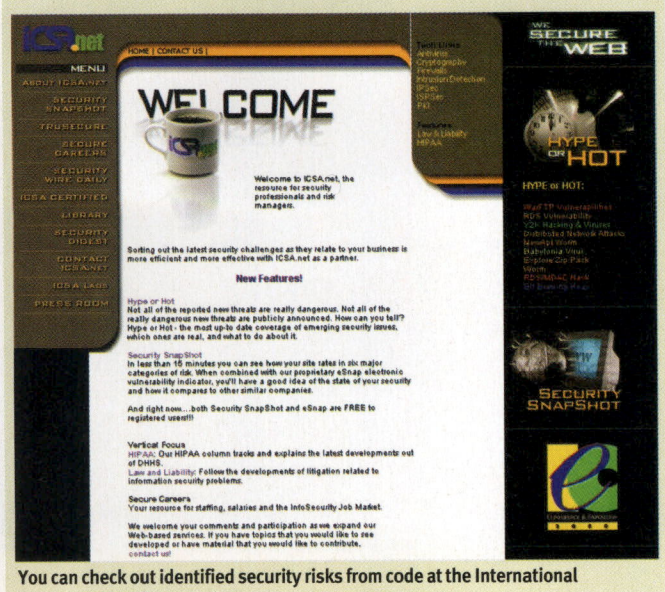
"We're in the middle of a battle for the Internet – a battle between content and functionality. My bet is functionality will win," says Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at Sophos Ltd (www.sophos.com).

The Internet was conceived as a medium for disseminating information, such as text and static graphics. But while this was fine for business and research, it didn't attract the mass consumer.

To make Web pages dance and sing, Web designers need to add functionality to the original text-based model. You can only add this functionality by using active code.

Active code

Active code is composed of programs or scripts that have been written in a language designed to improve the functionality and experience of the Internet. The danger to browsers is some of this code could be malicious. The ICSA (International Computer Security Association at www.icsa.net) has defined this as hostile active code. This includes hostile scripts, which are embedded in the Web's HTML pages, and hostile applets, which are small programs downloaded via HTML pages.



You can check out identified security risks from code at the International Computer Security Association (www.icsa.net)

The threat from active code

When you think about threats from the Internet, you probably think about viruses and dubious content. You can avoid Web viruses by not downloading executable files or documents that can carry macros. And you can limit dubious content by using Net nannies.

But more threats are beginning to appear. It's long been accepted that increased functionality in email would lead to problems. There's a growing tendency to send email as HTML rather than simple text, which lets you send more attractive and interesting personal messages. But if you use HTML in email, you're likely to encounter JavaScript and Visual Basic Scripting.

Towards the end of 1999, the first HTML/email virus, BubbleBoy, was released. This was thought to be an academic exercise to prove that you could be destructive by email. The first MS Word macro virus, Concept, worked in the same way as BubbleBoy and had some devastating effects.

BubbleBoy has Visual Basic Script embedded in the HTML. It's not visible, but now – for the first time – you can catch a virus simply by looking at your email.

If you're using Outlook Express with the preview pane open, BubbleBoy can infect your computer even if you don't open the offending message – all because of active code. Microsoft released a patch for this problem (but how many people monitor or download the MS patches?), and the anti-virus suppliers were quick to update their products.

Java

Java was conceived by Sun Microsystems as a cross-platform programming language. The idea was that a program written in Java would run equally well on a Macintosh or Windows computer. But it soon became clear that its cross-platform compatibility made it ideal for the Internet.

Java is a complete and fully functional programming language. It can do anything with your computer that can be done with other programming languages. To provide a degree of security, the developers of Java added the concept of the sandbox (a protected play area where you cannot do any harm to yourself or your system).

In practice, this means any unknown application you download from the Web can only operate within the confines of the sandbox and can't do things like write to your hard disk.

JavaScript and VBS

JavaScript is totally different from Java. It's more of a scripting language than a programming language. It was developed by Netscape to turn static Web pages into interactive experiences. JavaScript can make the Web more interesting and more attractive, and its use is becoming more widespread. But it does have some security concerns. Visual Basic Scripting (VBS) is Microsoft's version of JavaScript.

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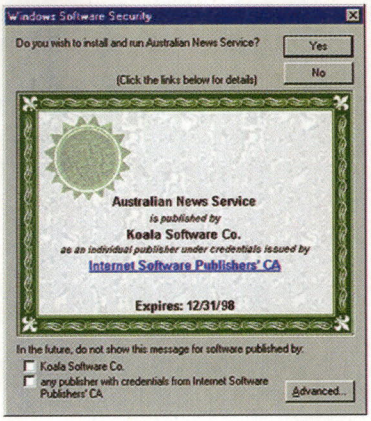


One of Microsoft's Authenticode certificates

Bubble boy is the first of a new genre of virus. It was created with Visual Basic Scripting. When malicious active code applets in Java and ActiveX start to proliferate by virus spreading techniques, you've got serious problems. At the moment, most people aren't aware of the damage potential of malicious active code. But there are several examples that should serve as a warning of things to come.

A couple of years ago, the Chaos Computer Club (an underground hacker organisation in Germany) demonstrated live on TV that it could use ActiveX controls to take over a user's PC and transfer money from one bank account to another. This was without the user's agreement or knowledge, without the bank's knowledge, and without a personal identification or transaction number. Fortunately, it was just a demonstration.

ActiveX

ActiveX was developed by Microsoft as a response to Sun's Java language. With ActiveX, you can produce controls to add to your Web pages. In this sense it's a direct competitor to Java.

Microsoft, as the king of functionality, decided that the security provided by the Java sandbox was too restrictive, so it developed the concept of authenticode certificates.

The theory is that before running an ActiveX control, you can challenge its parentage by demanding to see its authenticode certificate. This is a digital confirmation of who wrote the control that's issued by trusted third-party certificate authorities. But these certificates don't confirm that the control is secure, bug-free or virus-free – it only tells you that the author is who they claim to be.

The Chaos Club has released several malicious ActiveX controls on the Internet. Many browsers still have the 'I don't believe it until I see it' approach. But the likelihood is you won't see it – either until it's too late, or not at all. You can see potentially malicious ActiveX, safely, at **www.security7.com**. The site has constructed a number of examples to show what can be done. One of them simply interrogates your system and 'steals' information from your PC – including your password. It has the ability to alter your security settings to allow easy access for other controls.

Another example on the site pretends to give you useful information – in this case a weather map. But while you look at the map, the control examines your hard disk and creates a new directory. If this was a serious hostile control it could install whatever it wanted into that directory.

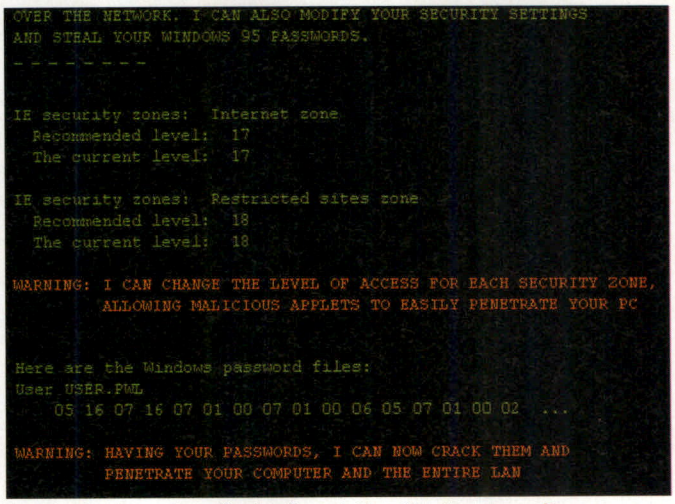
Staying safe

So what can you do to protect yourself from active code? First, you need to look at how Java and ActiveX handle the security issue with their built-in features. In the beginning, Java introduced the sandbox approach. This provided a virtual machine on your computer in which to run untrusted applets that you get from the Web.

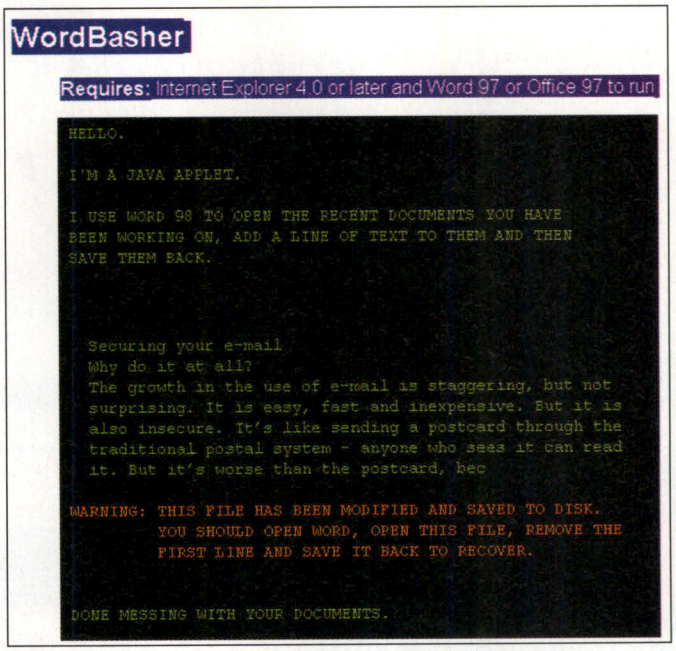
In the sandbox model, local code is trusted to have full access to vital parts of your computer, such as your file system. But downloaded remote code (such as an applet) isn't trusted and can only access the limited resources provided inside the sandbox.

The theory is good, but it suffers from two problems. First, bugs have been found that let malicious code escape from the sandbox. While you can fix these bugs fairly quickly, you can never be sure that more bugs won't appear in the future. Second, making the code run in a restricted environment reduces its functionality.

Microsoft chose a completely different route. Java says 'I don't know you, so you can come into the playroom, but you can't go anywhere else'. ActiveX says 'Tell me who you are – then you can go anywhere you like'. This is the Authenticode concept. Web developers can apply for digital certificates from trusted certification authorities, such as VeriSign (**www.verisign.com**). If they're granted, the certificates are built into the ActiveX control.



Security 7's password-stealing hostile applet in action at www.security7.com



You can safely look at Security 7's hostile file editing applet on its Web site

You can set your browser to check the certificates you encounter on the Web. You can refuse to accept all controls, only accept controls with a certificate you trust, or automatically allow all controls regardless of certificates (but don't set the latter).

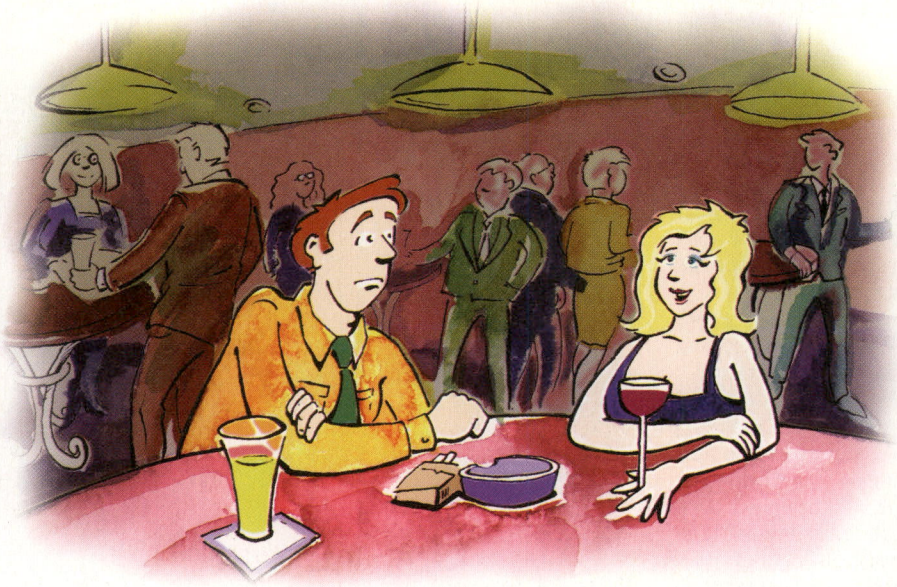
The default setting in Internet Explorer is medium. Under this setting you can store trusted certificates. If a control with a trusted certificate is found, it's automatically accepted. If it isn't been accepted, you're presented with the certificate and asked whether you wish to accept it.

This approach has the benefit of giving you control, but it also has its disadvantages. You must understand the issues involved with certification – and few people ever bother to do this. Also, the Authenticode certificate only confirms the author. It says nothing about the content or whether it can be trusted. It's up to you to decide whether to trust the content on the basis of what you know about the author.

To make a point, one developer produced a control called Exploder and obtained an Authenticode certificate. If you downloaded this control, you would've been presented with the certificate and been tempted to trust it. If you did, Exploder would've shut down your PC.

It could've done something far more dangerous, but the author just wanted to show that an Authenticode certificate doesn't verify the code. Exploder's certificate has been revoked by Microsoft and VeriSign, but it served its purpose by showing the dangers of certification.

Nevertheless, it's seen as the best way forward, and even Java's introduced certification into its latest version of the programming



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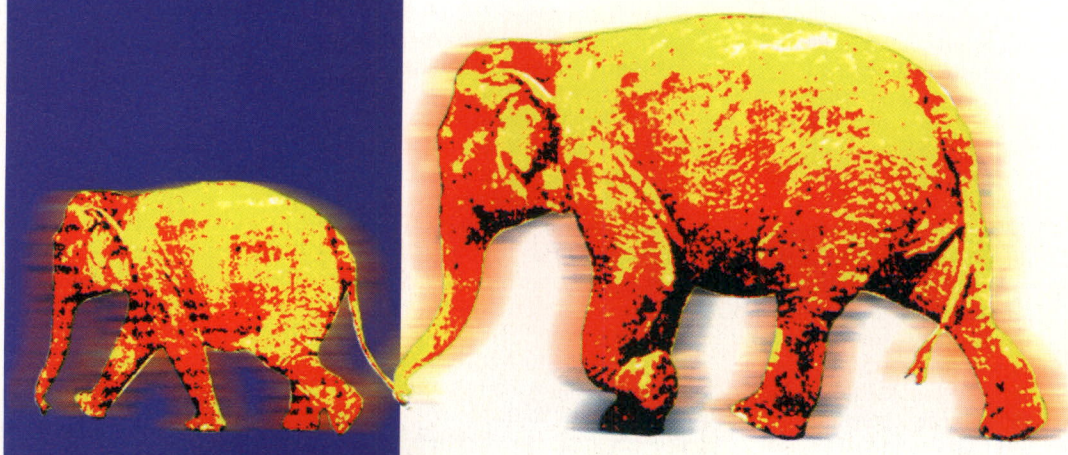

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language. All code, regardless of whether it's local or remote, can now be subject to a security policy that you can create.

The security policy defines the set of permissions available for code from various signers or locations. Each permission specifies the level of access to a particular resource, such as read and write access to a specified file or directory, or connect access to a given host and port.

The code becomes subject to these permissions so you can closely control access to your computer's resources.

Active code scanners and blockers

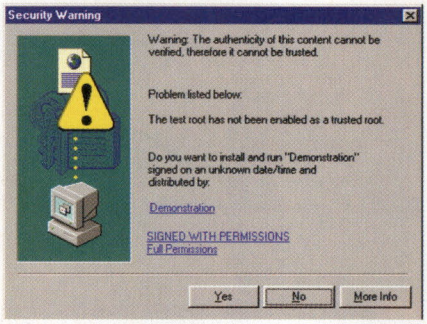
You can also use software to help protect your system from malicious active code. This falls into three broad categories – anti-virus products, mobile or malicious code detectors and intrusion detection scanners. Unfortunately, each category treats the problem differently, so you need elements of all three to be safe.

The leading anti-virus programs concentrate on finding virus signatures and disarming them. But the suppliers of anti-virus software won't become involved until a specific threat can be classified as a virus.

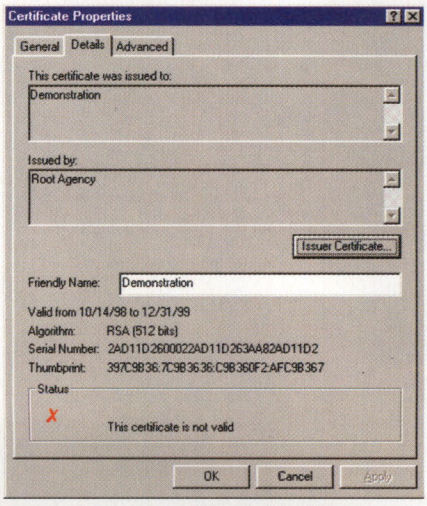
"Most anti-viral suppliers are concerned about false alarms," says Graham Clueley of Sophos Ltd. "It'd be easy to write generic software that would immediately detect all past, present and future viruses – but it'd also detect vast amounts of legitimate applications that might be viruses.

"The disruption you'd find would be intolerable – and it'd make you click 'OK' without considering the warning. That'd be dangerous."

There are several products designed to block mobile code, such as eSafe Protect (**www.esafe.com**), SurfinGate (**www.finjan.com**) and SafeGate (**www.security7.com**).



An Authenticode certificate – should you accept it..?

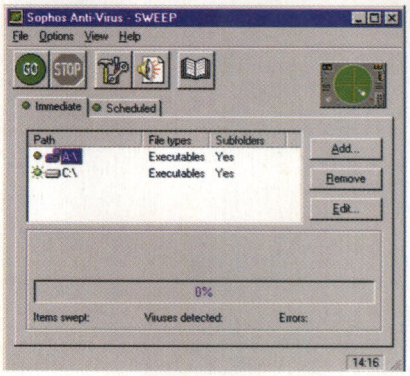


...definitely not – the certificate expired last year

Don't trust anyone

You shouldn't trust any product blindly. Finjan's early product, for instance, received considerable criticism. It worked by simply blocking the source URL of known malicious code – but the applet could get through if you simply changed the source URL. Finjan has introduced a new approach, called First Strike, that works on behaviour rather than a database of known hostile code. It's aimed at neutralising the danger from hostile code that hasn't been seen before, which means it can't be detected.

In some ways, it seems similar to the new approach from Java because it lets you define policies of acceptable behaviour on your system. A downloaded applet is blocked if it attempts an action that your policy doesn't allow.



Software like the Sophos (www.sophos.com) AV SWEEP protects your PC from all virus entry points

Finjan, the company that makes SurfinGate, says it gives its mobile code blocker greater abilities than the majority of existing anti-virus software. It claims it would've stopped the recent MiniZip worm in its tracks.

MiniZip wasn't a new virus – it was a compressed version of ExploreZip – but it was missed by the anti-virus scanners. This was because, as a compressed file, the signature was changed from known hostile code into something different – in exactly the same way that editing a Java applet without changing its functionality changes its digital fingerprint.

This illustrates the ongoing problems you're likely to face using the Web. Malicious code writers are always looking at new ways to beat your defences, while the software vendors are continually seeking new ways to defeat the attacks.

Another piece of software that you need to consider is an intrusion detection system, such as the software from ISS (**www.iss.net**). If the malicious applet is known, ISS will stop it.

But if it gets through your defences and onto you system, ISS will watch for any 'illegal' activity. What's legal and illegal is again based on your own security policy and enforced by your rules. Anything that contravenes your policy will be stopped.

Summary

Java, ActiveX, JavaScript and VBS are all used to improve your Net experience, but they also provide serious threats to your system. This can range from being a minor annoyance to seriously damaging your computer. And you need to take action to protect yourself.

"It's a risk management problem," says Kevin Black from ISS. "You need to balance the risk against the measures that you're willing to take." How much do you want or need that richer Net experience? If you don't need it, set your security settings to high, and don't let any Java or ActiveX controls in. Don't allow JavaScript or VBS to run at all.

If you want some of the experience, but you're a bit concerned, use the new code signing techniques. Check all the certificates carefully. If you don't recognise the author on the certificate, make enquiries before you accept it.

If you an afford it, invest in some of the back up software we've mentioned in this article. Use the resources of the software vendors to help you recognise and eliminate some of the threats.

But never delegate responsibility to the software. You're responsible for your security. so know the threats and act accordingly.

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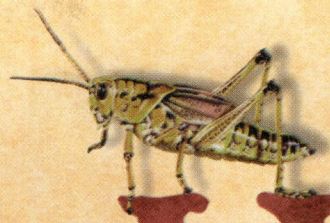

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— *Exodus 7-12*

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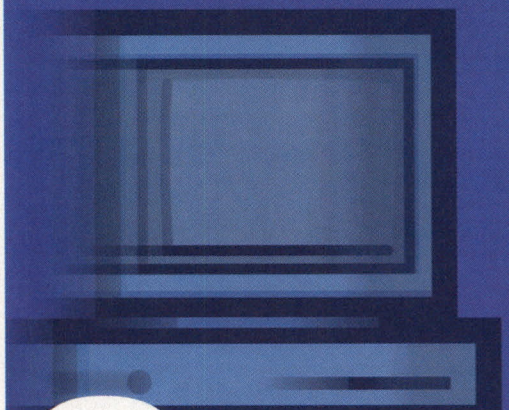

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tried &tested

This month's reviews// labs test / software / hardware / ISPs

In Tried & Tested

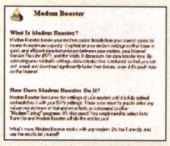
Internet Magazine is committed to bringing you the best and most authoritative reviews in the Internet industry. Every month we test and rate the most important new Internet products. If you're making a buying decision or doing a bit of pre-purchase research, the following pages are not to be missed.

In Tried & Tested you'll find comprehensive, comparative labs tests, reviews of the hottest Net products, and our exclusive ISP performance tests.

Macromedia Studio offers Fireworks 3 and Dreamweaver 3
See page 135

Key reviews for March

This month's labs test looks at the best download sites on the Web. What's the best way to transfer files to your PC and which are the best resources?
See page 126



Modem Booster optimises the speed of your Internet connection by making it more efficient, saving you money in the process
See page 137

Capture your favourite Web sites and browse them offline by using Zip Up The Web Pro from Insight Development
See page 138

Web Cleaner and Web Magnet from Data Becker let you block unwanted Net content and search for media files respectively
See page 138

iCollect is a Web download tool that makes it easy for you to collect images, sounds and videos from the Internet
See page 140

What's the state of your CDs at work – covered in coffee? Now you can start organising them with GMT's JBox, a retro-styled MP3 encoder and player
See page 140

March 2000 internet magazine ISP of the Month

Our exclusive ISP tests are the biggest and the best. Don't choose an ISP until you've seen the results
See page 144

And find the best performing Web hosting companies in our tests
See page 151

Star Ratings

★★★★★	Must buy
★★★★½	Should buy
★★★½	Could buy
★★½	Poor buy
★½	Don't buy

Download heaven

The best software resources on the Web

You can get thousands of fantastic, free software titles from the Web, but where can you find them and what's the best way to transfer them to your desktop? Roger Gann and the labs team give you the answers and assess the best download sites on the Web

You'll be amazed by the amount of great software that you can download from the Web, from simple freeware utilities to massive application suites and operating systems. As well as letting you sample shareware on a 'try before you buy' basis, the Internet is also a great vehicle for keeping your system up to date. On the Web you'll find program updates, patches and, to a lesser extent, upgraded device drivers. There are also plenty of retail download sites, such as Buyonet (**www.buyonet.com**), where you can buy retail software on the spot. With the prospect of high-speed fixed links, downloading files will be a fast-growing Internet business.

We've picked six of the best Web download sites and thoroughly checked them in our labs to see what they've got to offer.

Essential download tools

If you're running Windows 9x, you've already got the essentials you'll needed to download files – Internet Explorer, and an FTP client are included in the box as standard. The FTP client might be a dull and basic command-line program, but it does work. Between these two utilities, you'll be able to cope with most download chores. If you're serious about downloading files from the Web, you'll need something a bit more sophisticated than the crude Microsoft FTP client. Fortunately, you're spoilt for choice – the shareware scene has plenty of decent FTP clients. Have a look at the reliable CuteFTP (£26 from **www.cuteftp.com**) and WS_FTP Pro 6 (£26 from **www.ipswitch.com**). File transfer specialist Laplink.com has released a slick free FTP client, LapLink FTP 2, at **www.laplink.com**. The downside is the program carries advertising.

You'll also need a decompression utility to make compressed files usable. The undisputed best of these utilities is WinZip 7, available from **www.winzip.com** and included on our cover CD. This program not only handles just about every compressed file format known to man, but it's also easy to use, particularly if you opt for the wizard-style interface.

Downloading files over the Internet can be a fraught, highly unpredictable business. Losing your connection at the end of a long download will drive you nuts. This is such a common problem that a whole new class of software, called download managers, has emerged to address it. The best known download manager, Go!zilla, offers recovery from download errors, resumption of failed downloads and scheduling of file downloads, plus a host of optimisation tricks designed to speed up your downloads. Go!Zilla will also switch between mirror sites to meet your minimum transfer speed requirements. You can download the program from **www.gozilla.com**. But there are many other worthy download managers, including:

- **Netzip Download Demon** at **www.netzip.com**
- **Download Genie** at **www.downloadgenie.com**
- **Download Assistant** at **www.iolo.com**
- **Download Wonder** at **ftp.40software.com**
- **Download Butler** at **www.lincolnbeach.com/butler.asp**

Once you've found what you're after, click on Download and this is what you'll see

Good download practice

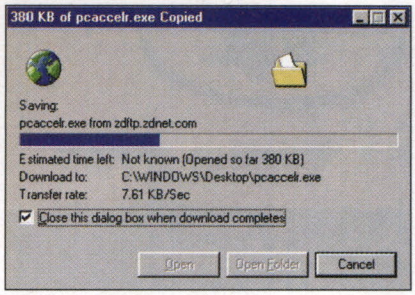
If you're going to download lots of files, it pays to have some sort of routine. For a start, you'll need to organise the files on your hard disk. You could simply download them straight to your desktop, but this can be messy – it's far better to create a separate folder for downloads.

What happens once you've downloaded depends on the format of the file. Files with an .exe extension are executable or program files that you can run without needing to do anything – they'll either run themselves or run a setup program to install itself. Many of the files you download from the Net will have a .zip suffix and require some attention before you can use them.

A zip file, also referred to as an archive, is a single file that has several files stored within it. To be able to do this, the multiple files are compressed in size, which saves hard drive space and reduces the time the zip file takes to download. Some .exe files are compressed archives that'll automatically decompress when you double-click on them. But in other instances you'll need to unzip or decompress the files before you can view them. This is where WinZip comes in. If you double-click on the downloaded zip file, your installed copy of WinZip will launch automatically. Now

Macintosh sites

The Web is still biased towards Windows, and the vast majority of download sites give overwhelming precedence to Windows users, treating the Mac as an also-ran. Fortunately, many of the larger sites have respectable quantities of Mac shareware and public domain software. These include ZDNet (**www.zdnet.com**), Download.com (**http://download.cnet**) and TUCOWS (**www.tucows.com**). You'll also find some excellent download sites that specialise in Mac software. One of the best is Version Tracker, a free site that lists, describes and links to the latest updates to Macintosh software and lets you search for commercial updates, upgrades, shareware, freeware, and beta software. Other Mac specialist sites that are worth a visit include **www.macorchard.com**, **www.macshare.com** and **www.arn.net/software/macsoftwaresites.html**



Your file's on its way – don't lose that connection now

simply double-click on the files and save them to a folder of your choice.

You can install some of your software online, direct from the Web server to your PC, without needing to download it first. This is a neat solution, but some programs can be extremely large to download – a complete install of IE5 approaches 100Mb. In this instance, it's often better to install the browser from a CD-ROM, such as our free cover CD.

Most of the files you download fall into a few different categories. Freeware and public domain software is free for you to use indefinitely, though you might have to send the author a postcard or do a good deed in return. Shareware and demo software lets you try out a program, with some or all of its features. If you like it, you can buy the full version or pay for a code to upgrade your demo copy.

You should always be wary of viruses when downloading from the Web. Update your anti-virus software and use it to scan files before you install them.

Download protocols: FTP vs HTTP 350

Most major file archives on the Net let you get files either over the Web or via FTP. Most people find Web sites more convenient. But you'll find FTP is faster and more reliable for transferring files from the Net to your desktop. Web browsers don't always maintain constant connections to FTP sites, causing slow, aggravating downloads. The HTTP protocol wasn't designed with file transfers in mind, whereas file transfer protocol (FTP) was.

For small files, it probably doesn't make much difference which method you use. For larger files, especially those bigger than 1Mb, you'll get better results using your FTP program. Even allowing for the time needed to launch your FTP program and connect to the desired FTP site, it'll probably complete the download quicker than your browser would. You can get some excellent, inexpensive and even free FTP clients.

You can also use your Web browser to access FTP sites – instead of using the **http://www** prefix, you'd use something like **ftp://ftp**. To access the Microsoft FTP site, for instance, you'd type in **ftp://ftp.microsoft.com** and be presented with a window that resembles an Explorer view of your hard disk.

Most FTP sites require some sort of login – many let you gain 'anonymous' access by entering your email address as a login name and 'anonymous' as a password. Sites that ask for a proper password require slightly different treatment. In your browser you'd use your username and password as prefixes in the URL. If your user name is Billg and your password is billionaire, you'd use **ftp://billg:billionaire@ftp.server.com**.

In IE5 you can click the File menu and select 'Login as' to create a normal login dialog box. In Netscape Navigator, the login procedure is slightly different – the syntax, using the example above, would be **ftp://billg@ftp.server.com**. A dialog box would then pop up requesting the password.

Public sites

Academic sites contain an astonishing amount of download material, and platforms such as Linux are well supported. These sites are typically spartan, lacking in eye-catching graphics and content, and often contain nothing more than a list of files. But they're often best accessed via FTP than the Web. A good starting place is **www.mirror.ac.uk**. The SimTel network is also worth checking out at **www.simtel.net/simtel.net/mirrors.html**. It specialises in MS-DOS, Windows 3.1x and Windows 9x software. Finally, pay a visit to the CICA WinSite Archive FTP site at **www.winsite.com**.

Other useful Web download sites

http://32bit.com
www.32bit.com
http://filepile.com
www.filez.com
www.galttech.com
www.jumbo.com
www.SoftSeek.com
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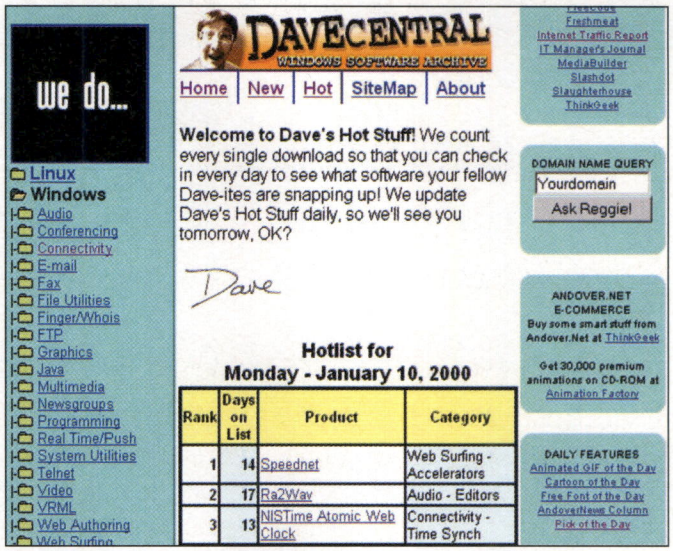

There's plenty of software and entertainment on the site, but you have to link to suppliers' sites to do the downloading

A clear and simple site that offers download links, but sadly no ratings

DaveCentral is hosted on the Andover.Net empire that runs a number of Internet and computing related sites. Its family of sites includes another major Web download site – the attractively named (and presumably referring to the Tucows download site) Slaughterhouse.com, as well as other worthy sites, such as The Internet Traffic Report.

Visually, the site is simple, with a clean, easy to follow interface that's largely untroubled by ads. The navigation on this site is reasonably straightforward and a link to a site map has a prominent position.

DaveCentral concentrates on Linux and Windows software, so it's tough luck, as usual, for Macintosh users. The home page has Windows links on the left and Linux links on the right. Each column has around a dozen 'recent additions' with links to a more complete list of software.

The site was impressively up to date, and listed files that had been added during the past week and 24 new files for the day of our visit. These had been categorised and marked as additions or updates. As soon as you select the What's New list, a panel on the left changes to display an Explorer-like tree of 20 file categories (and sub-categories), ranging from Audio to Web surfing. To jump to a category, you simply click that entry on the tree. A search window at the bottom of the tree takes you straight to a file if you know the exact name of it. The What's New page gives you Dave's Pick, the site's choice of software, plus 'Today's top five downloads'.

When you get to the page for the file you want to download, you get a screenshot, a good description of the software and a suitable operating systems list, plus links to the designer's home page.

There doesn't appear to be any files in the software archive itself – the download links on these pages only point to the download home page of each program.

Meanwhile, back at DaveCentral, you can post comments on the software in a discussion forum. But on the downside, the site offers no scoring of individual files, so you can't tell whether a download's any good.

DaveCentral has a reasonable amount of content to keep you amused while you're downloading – the list of daily features (delivered courtesy of Andover.Net) is impressive, with an animated GIF and cartoon of the day, as well as a free font of the day. There's also the obligatory shareware pick of the day, though this is nothing more than a link to the Slaughterhouse.com site. You'll also find a range of lightweight Web tools, such as 3D Text Maker, which lets you create a banner for your Web page and then download it.

★★★☆☆

DaveCentral Shareware Archive
www.davecentral.com

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the insider's guide

CNET

Download.com

Most of the software at Download.com has to be downloaded from developers' sites

The big name in downloads is high on quantity but short on recommendations

The Computer Network, CNET, has spawned a number of overlapping and interrelated big-name Web sites, including Shareware.com and Download.com. These two download sites are virtually identical and can be treated as the same site.

Download.com is a large site, and the banner at the top of its home page promises access to more than a quarter of a million files – but you will have to search the Internet to do this. The site draws its source material from the bottomless pit that is the Internet – you'll find PC, Mac, Linux, Windows CE and PalmOS software featured in its comprehensive listings. But be warned – this is a highly commercial site, so you're never too far away from a banner advert on any given page.

The home page looks a lot like a Web portal, with a plethora of links to other tempting sites, such as Quake III, Find MP3s, ICQ and auction pages. Prominence is given to the search facility that you use to find the files you want to download.

You also get links to the most popular downloads, new releases (over 411 were added in the seven days before our visit) and 'Our Picks'. The most popular download of the moment is ICQ, with over 81 million downloads, followed by WinZip, trailing in a distant second with a measly 17 million. Unlike other download sites, Download.com has a reasonably up to date list of driver software.

You'll find a lot of files listed at Download.com, but the site ultimately fails to add much value. When you eventually select a file to download, you're typically presented with a sizeable list of download sites to choose from, particularly if the software isn't well known. The software itself is never located at Download.com, but at an FTP mirror site, such as a SimTel or Sunsite mirror. For the most popular software, you usually have to download it from the developer's home page. So, while it might give access to a lot of files, the files themselves aren't located at Downloads.com.

The vast majority of the listed software isn't reviewed and you're more likely to get general bumph written by the software developer, so you can't rely too much on their recommendations. There are no ratings of software packages and some of the downloads don't have any descriptions at all. But you do get basic file info, such as version number, file size and expected download times.

When you perform a search or drill down through the categories, you'll see the useful gauge of popularity and the number of copies downloaded. Curiously, files with as few as 1,100 downloads are called popular. I guess that makes ICQ very popular.

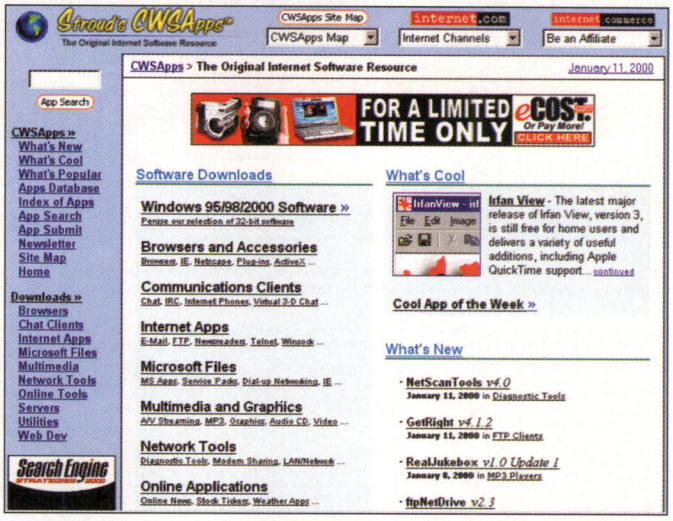
Software is categorised to a fairly fine degree and you can sort selections by the column heading, such as by size or popularity, but this can be slow. You can also buy a limited range of listed software online.

★★★☆☆

Download.com(CNET)
http://Download.cnet.com

STROUD'S CWSAPPS

Stroud's



The Stroud's site is in the middle of a makeover, so expect an improvement soon

Plenty of details about what's on offer, hampered by a slightly clunky design

Modestly billing itself as the 'original Internet software resource', Stroud's Consumate Winsock Apps list is – unlike the other Winsock site, TUCOWS – aimed solely at Windows users, though it doesn't provide for Windows CE. Mac and Linux users aren't catered for either. Its all thanks to Forrest Stroud, the clever 25 year old who founded the site back in 1994.

If you're a Windows user, Stroud's list is well worth a look. From its humble origins, Stroud's CWS Apps has come a long way, picking up some gloss (it recently underwent an extensive design makeover) and a reasonably clear and simple to use interface in the process.

The site maintains strong links with Mecklermedia's Internet.com, 'the e-business and Internet technology network'. At first glance, Stroud's looks like a portal and the site borrows heavily from well-known portals such as Yahoo! and Excite for its basic layout, which is no bad thing.

There are banner ads at the top and bottom of the home page, which is a fairly tolerable level of advertising. A small gripe is that the home page is far too long. There are over three full screens of content from top to bottom to scroll through, which makes navigation unwieldy. As well as file downloads, the site also offers a small amount of content, including a free updates newsletter by email and regular visitors' poll.

Refreshingly, you can choose between various 'hot picks', such as What's New, What's Cool, What's Popular and the Top 25 downloads. Its listings were bang up to date, with the latest releases of Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator. But they also had, lurking among the goodies in the Microsoft area, more than a few stale old beta versions that should have been removed ages ago.

Choosing and finding a file is straightforward. The home page lists the 14 categories on the site, including one section devoted exclusively to Microsoft updates, which is really handy if you're a Windows user.

The site's makeover isn't complete yet, so not all of the sections enjoy the same interface. The new look gives you a one-line summary of the details for each title. This is sortable by name, date and score (though it doesn't tell you the number of downloads – a useful gauge of popularity – for each piece of software).

The majority of file categories still use the rather unwieldy 'box' type format. That said, Stroud goes one better than WinFiles and its boxes do contain more useful information. For a start, each title is scored out of five stars and you can get a decent review (some of them several screens long) of the software. Unfortunately, this old-style format prevents any sorting of the file list in the order you want. No files are located at Stroud's site – you simply get the standard link to the developer's download page.

★★★★☆

Stroud's CWSApps
http://Cws.internet.com

WINSOCK

TUCOWS

TUCOWS stores files locally, so you'll find downloads speedier than on other sites

A speedy site with lots of good software for kids and a bias towards the Internet

This oddly named site has some claim to being the doyen of Web download sites, having been around since the dawn of the Internet... well... 1993. It's nothing to do mad cows – it's an acronym for The Ultimate Collection of Winsock Software. Started as a public service, the network has grown to over 700 affiliates in 70 countries, so you're never far from a TUCOWS site, which should mean faster, more consistent download times. In the true spirit of the Internet, this is a public-spirited outfit, and isn't overtly commercial.

When you first access the TUCOWS home page, you're urged to select a more local mirror site, though you're free to use any you like. Selecting Europe reveals the list of UK mirrors available. This varies from category to category – TUKIDS (the kids area) has only two mirror sites, while the Windows software category has more than half a dozen. Sites that are Primary Affiliates and updated regularly are denoted by a pair of ticks, so these should be your first choice. Changing categories can mean having to reselect a mirror site, which can get irritating.

You'd think, judging by the name, that TUCOWS would have a strong Windows bias, but this isn't the case – it has software for Windows, Macintosh and BeOS operating systems, all rated and checked for viruses. If you dig a little deeper you'll find plenty of Linux software and a whole section devoted to PDA software. Remember that the emphasis is strictly on Internet software at TUCOWS.

TUCOWS has a unique feature that parents will appreciate – TUKIDS. This is a special area devoted to little adults full of specially selected educational and fun software that kids can download without parental supervision. You can get up to 1,000 software titles from TUCOWS. It's also, like many download sites, a Web portal – you'll find news (fed by USA Today), online shopping, (courtesy of ebarn.com), and you can buy selected software for download. A free email newsletter, T-MILK, is also up for grabs.

TUCOWS betrays its hobbyist background by looking less polished than its rivals. But finding what you're looking for isn't particularly taxing as a result. You can either search for a file, by operating system, or scroll through the category lists to select what you want. You're then presented with a table of broad categories and sub-categories.

Choose a file you're interested in, and you'll get a summary of useful information,including version number, file size and a short description. Each piece of software is rated out of five cows. You can look at the site's overall top 100 download list or, more accurately, top 10s in seven categories. There's also a pick of the week, the 'Head of the Herd' for Windows and Mac platforms, plus the obligatory What's New section – 13 programs were updated on the day we visited the site. Unlike other download sites, TUCOWS stores the software locally, which speeds things up a bit.

★★★★☆

TUCOWS Network
www.tucows.com

ZDNET

ZDNet Downloads

ZDNet Downloads is part of the massive ZDNet publishing site

An excellent service full of useful features, good design and handy utilities

Owned and run by Ziff-Davis, the US magazine publishing giant, ZDNet is a massive Web site that has links to its magazines and a whole lot more. It's one of the better portals on the Net, with plenty of quality content, a slick design and precious little in the way of obtrusive adverts.

ZDNet Downloads is the mother of all download sites. Unlike many of its rivals, the files you can download from here are stored locally, which is convenient. You'll find around 40,000 files here, reviewed and awarded between one and five stars. Older programs are continuously weeded out to make room for the latest files.

ZDNet Downloads caters for three platforms – Windows, Mac and Palm. Linux isn't specifically listed, but you'll find a small amount of material. You can also get free utilities specially written by Ziff-Davis plus ZDNet Exclusives – a small collection of free software available to registered visitors.

The home page is full of links, so you might find it overwhelming trying to choose where to go first – there's the Free File of the day, the Hot File of the day, the Top 10 downloads, and a What's New section, among others. You do have to scroll down a little to reveal the Downloads Directory box, which sorts downloads into 16 broad categories, including software demos, development tools, editor's picks and games. Each category has its own home page, with plenty of content to keep you occupied as you drill down to a sub-category. The file list has a one-line summary for each title, showing the date it was written, a star rating, compatible operating systems and the number of downloads the software has had so far.

Selecting a file takes you to its page, which has a short review, file size and version number. You can either download or add the file to your download basket. You can add files to it and download the lot in one go, which can simplify things.

The one gap in ZDNet's otherwise impressive array of downloads is device drivers. But the useful My Updates area partly makes up for this. It doesn't offer drivers, but what it takes a snapshot of your system, using a snazzy ActiveX download, and compares the version numbers of your software with the latest versions on its site. It then lists the upgrades available. Sadly, My Updates doesn't work for Windows 3.1x or Macs, which is a great pity. The updates and patches aren't kept locally – you're usually transferred to the manufacturer's download page. My Updates has also become distinctly commercial – it now advises you of major application upgrades that you can buy online. Nevertheless, it's a useful, unique and free service.

★★★★★

ZDNet Downloads
www.zdnet.com/downloads

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Prices exclude VAT (where applicable) and are based on annual contracts. Speed trials were based on Independent Testing.
Standard Nominet Fee is £80 for two years. All trademarks acknowledged. E.&O.E.

CNET

WinFiles

Some useful content, but no use unless it's Windows software you're after

Founded in 1995, WinFiles is yet another arm of the CNET computer Network. As you might guess from its name, you won't find too much Macintosh or Linux software at WinFiles.com – it has nothing but Windows programs, including software for Windows CE. The site, somewhat cheekily, uses the Windows 9x interface as its own, with items displayed as icons within an Explorer window, and the clouds image from Windows 9x as wallpaper.

Unlike most of its rivals, WinFiles keeps stocks of device drivers, or rather links and pointers to the latest drivers. WinFiles is a lean and mean Web site that doesn't store files locally – all you get is a link to the site that holds the file in question. Annoyingly, you don't get taken to the precise link for the software developer – you're dumped at the head of a long list of links to find it for yourself, which is irritating. This isn't a particularly fresh part of the site – the most recent driver was added a month ago, when we looked. But other additions to the site were made only a few days previously.

In true Windows style, when you select the icon for the category you're interested in, you're presented with another window, with more icon sub-categories. This metaphor breaks down when you scroll down a stage further – this time you're just presented with a list of categories, and then a file list. Each file has its own details box, with a short description and the usual file and registration details. There's no way to sort this list and there's no attempt at evaluation – you won't find any download scores or marks out of five either. Again, these are presented as a long list, which makes scrolling a pain. The download link takes you to the developer's Web site to start the actual download.

It's a Windows lookalike site, with – you've guessed it – loads of Windows software to download

WinFiles tries to be more than just another download site, and offers a little added value in the form of limited, but useful content. For instance, you'll find several how-to articles on networking and the Internet. There's also a somewhat limited tips and tricks section, but these are nothing compared to the content you can get at ZDNet. A free weekly email newsletter is also available, to keep you abreast of new releases and updates. The site has a strong commercial flavour, too, and there are several prominent online shopping links to CNET itself. Other links, such as Tech Help and Software Reviews, take you away from the site to the main CNET pages. Ultimately, the WinFiles site is just Downloads.com sliced up in a different way, and there are better sites to visit.

★★☆☆☆

WinFiles
www.winfiles.com

Download sites compared

Name	D/L Speed seconds	Files held locally?	Rated?	Other content?	Win31	Win9x	Windows NT	Windows CE	Macintosh	Linux	Palm	EPOC
DaveCentral	138	✘	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘	✔	✘	✘
Download.com	360	Some	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘
TUCOWS	135	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
WinFiles	155	✘	✘	✔	✘	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘	✘	✘
ZDNet Downloads	150	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Some	Some	✘

Conclusion: which should you choose?

Most download sites don't satisfy every browser because they only list files for a limited range of operating systems.

TUCOWS, with easily the best coverage of different platforms, was easily the winner in this respect. We also looked at how fast we could download from our test sites. We downloaded copies of WinZip 7, a 921Kb file, and timed how long it took to download – using a 64Kbps ISDN connection – from the moment we clicked on the first download link.

The slowest site was Downloads.com, by a significant margin. The sites that merely point to the software developer's download page rather than keep the file locally seemed to offer no real speed advantages. TUCOWS, which kept WinZip locally, was a fraction faster than DaveCentral, which linked direct to the WinZip site. It was also the fastest site overall. But while TUCOWs enjoys these important advantages, it still doesn't compete with the best download site of the lot, ZDNet Downloads. This is an extremely well-constructed site that offers the crème de la crème of downloadable software, as well as a wide variety of excellent content just a few clicks away. Its design is also state of the art. Its coverage isn't perfect – Linux is a glaring omission – but the broad range of free facilities that the site offers, particularly the My Updates section, make it clear winner in this labs test.

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Speed Rank	Company	Average Transfer Rate, Kb/s	Server Uptime
1st	**Virtual Internet**	**424**	**99.98%**
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5th	EasyNet	331	99.41%
11th	Netbenefit	211	99.76%
35th	Scotland Online	69	98.80%
54th	Corpex	49	98.74%
68th	RapidSite / Verio	19	99.39%

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Source: Internet Magazine "Best Performing Hosting Companies", July 1999. Based on data from Zeus Technologies. Survey of 79 firms (not all shown). Please ask to see full list.

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New Products March

This month, we review a Web connection optimiser, offline browsing software, a Web monitor and search tool, a download utility and a retro-style CD jukebox

WEB DESIGN PACKAGE

Dreamweaver 3 Fireworks 3 Studio

Streamline your workflow with this impressive authoring and design package

The new releases of Dreamweaver 3 and Fireworks 3 (only six months after the release of Fireworks 2) contain a substantial number of features that are guaranteed to keep Macromedia's profit margins healthy and beavering Web developers happy.

March 2000 internet magazine Best Buy

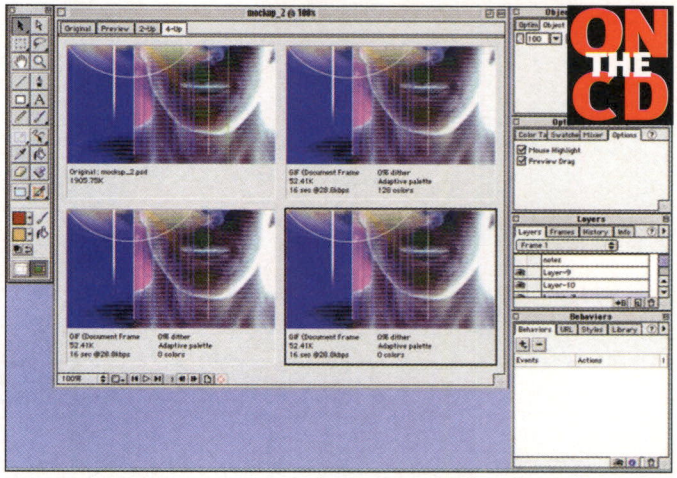
Fireworks

Fireworks 3 has received a significant makeover from the development team at Macromedia, making it by far the most extensive Web graphics software on the market. The close relationship between Dreamweaver and Fireworks means Fireworks 3 is the most comprehensive and complete graphics design package you can get, with extensive cross-package compatibility for both native HTML and JavaScript.

So, what does this progeny of Fireworks have over its predecessors? Fully editable image options with vector control of bitmap images remains at the core of Fireworks, and subtle enhancements have made this easier. You can now export images in a range of formats including Illustrator 7, Flash and Lotus Domino; 8-bit and 24-bit bitmaps and multiple-bit PNGs are also supported.

Exporting images in Fireworks 3 is much smoother than before, as each image workspace has tabs for previewing various outputs simultaneously at the design stage (see picture, above right). This feature also supports active content, including rollovers and animated sequences.

JavaScript plays a key role in the manipulation of Fireworks and Dreamweaver – you get a history pallette in both programs, which lets you retrace your steps. You can also save any sequence of actions as a JavaScript function and use it later on. You can also customise both programs using JavaScript.



Each image workspace now has tabs for previewing various outputs simultaneously

Specific new features in Fireworks 3 include support for paths, which you can paste into other popular design packages.

The Slice feature has been updated so you can now create overlapping slices without causing HTML conflicts. And, by a twist of wizardry, you can create polygon slices that let you swap irregular, interlocking shapes.

You can import third-party filters from other programs, such as Photoshop, with full editable control even after effects have been applied.

Making buttons is easier than ever with the Macromedia Button Editor. Tips are thrown at you left, right and centre, and behind the scenes automation means you don't need to worry about technical intricacies when you're altering button components.

Other worthwhile features include a gamma preview for images, scaling and rotating tools, more control over your text elements, and the ability to use your own bitmap files to produce textures and patterns.

Beyond this, Web developers will be pleased to see a symbols library for graphics and buttons, navigation bar behaviours and a clipboard wizard for inserting HTML into other popular editors, such as FrontPage, Dreamweaver and GoLive. The support for Photoshop files has increased – you'll now benefit from layer retention, effects editing and text recognition.

While you're getting to grips with these mind-boggling tools, you can get some help at **www.macromedia.com/support/fireworks**. For more tips and comments, you can also log onto the Fireworks newsgroup at **news://forums.macromedia.com/macromedia.fireworks**.

The history of Fireworks and Dreamweaver

Fireworks was introduced in the spring of 1998 to a largely unsuspecting crowd of Web graphic designers. Until then, Photoshop, Illustrator and Freehand had been the leading packages for preparing Web graphics. With the Web's rapid rate of development, Fireworks 2 was released in the summer of 1999.

Fireworks has always pushed the boundaries of graphics software for the Net – it was the first program to create Web-specific effects such as image maps, image slicing and HTML table construction – as well as complex, multiple image rollovers and animated GIFs. All the images you create in Fireworks are stored as fully editable PNG files, so updating the format of a complete directory of images has always been a straightforward batch-processing task (a process which you can now save as a script for future use with Fireworks 3).

Dreamweaver was introduced in December 1997. At the time, it was the first visual editor with HTML access and support for cross-browser JavaScript effects and browser type detection. Since then, Dreamweaver's rise has been assured through the prodigious developments made in versions 2 and the latest release, Dreamweaver 3. A notable area of development has been the package's flexibility – it's difficult to ascertain the market that Dreamweaver's geared towards since it covers most people's needs.

The program's tools and features now support the demands of anyone from a novice working at home on their first site to big players with authoring teams building and maintaining their site. When a company like Microsoft says it uses this package, you get a good idea of how powerful it is.

Foresight has always been the key to Dreamweaver's success. At the time of its release, version 2 was the first HTML editor to support XML documents, and the latest release goes much further with its own built-in parser. This is all in stark contrast to the browsers where a fully XML compliant browser is still awaited.

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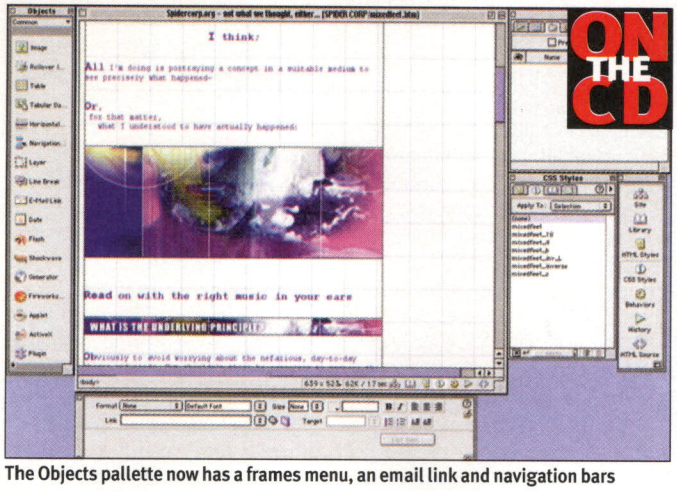

The Objects pallette now has a frames menu, an email link and navigation bars

Dreamweaver

The new features and improvements in Dreamweaver 3 are guaranteed to make your Web pages better than ever. New features include a QuickTagEditor that lets you edit roundtrip HTML in the visual environment, rather than calling up the source code window.

A powerful HTML Styles editor lets you make huge improvements to the design and layout of your text, which is supported by the CSS Styles palette. All the rich media content plug-ins are supported and the program now has a history palette that lets you save multiple tasks as JavaScript commands for future repetitive tasks.

An HTML source editor gives you improved access for manipulating your code and the third-party tag model gives you control over the content of non-HTML tags, including ASP. You can adapt the editable tag model to your own needs.

Synchronisation of your local site to the server version means only the latest copy of each file is stored at both locations. And while you're doing that, you can update, check or cross-reference the URLs in your embedded Flash movies.

Dreamweaver supports all the Web languages you'll have come across, including full support for XML with a built-in parser. The tracing image used for turning composite images into HTML pages has also been updated.

The Objects pallette now has a Frames menu and an email link, with navigation bars to drag into your file. The new tables palette lets you insert layers, build your CSS Style sheets and hold your templates.

Another palette acts as a library for symbols, such as images and text. Those annoying characters with unfamiliar ASCII code and shortcuts are finally at your fingertips in their own, private menu on the Object palette.

Dreamweaver is a superior package that'll meet the needs of most Web designers. Its appearance hasn't changed much, and you still have to close your browser before you can do a preview. But it's still the best Web design package you can get and it's a wise investment.

Macromedia is also developing a useful support section for users at **www.macromedia.com/support/dreamweaver**.

Marketing Dreamweaver and Fireworks as a single package is a sound approach. The compatibility of the two programs includes fast image editing – click on an image in the layout within Dreamweaver and it'll open your image in Fireworks.

Alternatively, you can launch an image expressly into a Fireworks optimisation window, reducing the file size and download times for your published page.

You can get a 30-day trial of Dreamweaver 3 and Fireworks 3 from our free cover CD or the Macromedia Web site.

Charlie Young

★★★★★

Dreamweaver 3 Fireworks 3 Studio

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Cons *It's not free*
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WEB OPTIMISATION UTILITY

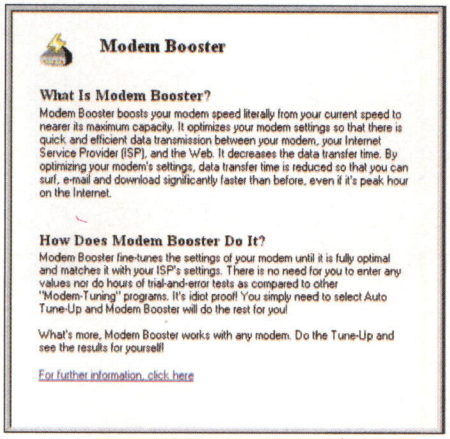
Modem Booster

Optimise the speed of your Internet connection with this useful utility

We all want a faster Internet experience, but until everyone has ADSL digital connections, you'll have to put up with the bandwidth on offer from analogue modems. This means you need to extract the last ounce of bandwidth out of your 56k modem, and help is at hand from Modem Booster, a $20 (around £12) utility from Inkline Global.

This Windows program doesn't modify or optimise your modem, it makes your TCP/IP connection more efficient. The original version of Windows 95 wasn't optimised for the Internet, so TCP/IP was, naturally, updated for local area network performance.

Modem Booster attempts to eliminate TCP/IP packet fragmentation and thereby increase data throughput. These TCP packet size settings were originally configured for LANs (local area networks) and similar networks, so it didn't take Internet connections into account. As a result, the default values for these arcane settings typically hinder the performance of your Net connection.



Modem Browser could knock 10 per cent off your bill

Modem Booster will tweak your Windows default settings for MaxMTU (the default packet size used by Windows and the Internet), RWIN (the amount of received data that can be buffered at one time on a connection) and TTL (an indicator for how long a packet should be allowed to survive before it's discarded). All this means you don't have to manually change the registry and, even better, you don't have to know what any of the settings do.

If you know what you're doing, you don't need any software to change these obscure TCP/IP settings – you can just change them manually in your registry using RegEdit. But this route is fraught with pitfalls, particularly for the novice, which is why you can get software that make these changes for you.

Overall, from a technical point of view, Modem Booster doesn't offer much more than the plethora of shareware alternatives. What it does have is an automated process that optimises your TCP/IP settings for a particular ISP, rather than a pre-determined set of values. You can do this yourself, but it's intimidating for novices. On the downside, the automated optimisation process is a long, drawn-out affair that you should do at cheap rate times.

Once the process is complete, Modem Booster gives you an optimisation reading – you should notice a 10 to 15 per cent improvement on a typical Windows PC. If Modem Booster can knock 10 per cent off your Internet phone bill, it won't take long to pay for itself. You can get a 21-day demo from the Inkline Web site.

You'll find plenty of optimisation programs at **www.hotfiles.com**. They all do a similar job, and some are available as freeware, so have a look around the download sites first.

Roger Gann

★★★☆☆

Modem Booster

Price *$19.95 (around £12)*
Pros *Easy to use, cheap, worth trying the demo at least*
Cons *The lengthy optimisation process*
Contact *Inkline Global*
www.inklineglobal.com

OFFLINE BROWSING SOFTWARE

Zip Up The Web Pro

Save yourself money by capturing Web sites and browsing them offline

Until we've all got permanent connections to the Web, browsing the Internet will continue to be a costly affair – the more you browse, the more you pay your telco. The smart way around this wallet-emptying business is to browse offline – you go to a site, save all the pages you want to view and disconnect. You can then take your time and savour each page without worrying about your phone bill.

Zip Up The Web Pro, from Insight Development, is a new offline browser utility that lets you download a complete site, choose settings for retrieval and filtering, and set page and resource locations to fine-tune your site captures.

This useful software lets you download a Web site and browse it at your leisure offline

The program is straightforward to use – it grabs a Web page and creates an executable file that displays the page when you're offline. You enter a URL, specify the name and destination for the output file, use your Web connection to retrieve the page and create the executable file.

Clicking on this file when you're offline decompresses the data to your TEMP folder and opens the home page in your browser. The data file isn't exactly a zip file – it's a self-extracting archive, but it does comply with the zip format.

While it's simple to use, this program lacks a number of features that you'll find in rival products. The Options button doesn't give you much control over the product – the most you can do is select the type of online components you don't want to download, such as binaries or audio and video files.

You can't eliminate banner ads, which would have been a useful feature, and there's not a progress indicator in sight – a serious omission as it took at least five minutes) to download even tiny sites with less than 50Kb of HTML.

Windows 98 was rather unresponsive while Zip Up The Web Pro was doing its stuff. It also rejected perfectly legitimate URLs.

If you need to archive Web sites, you can download a stripped-down, lite version of Zip Up The Web Pro before you decide to buy it. But make sure you shop around first – other products, such as the slightly more expensive WebZip (from **www.spidersoft.com**), offer some strong competition.

Roger Gann

★★★☆☆

Zip Up The Web Pro

Price *£18 (a free lite version is available for evaluation purposes)*
Pros *It does what it claims to do, but not a lot else*
Cons *Slow, limited configurability*
Contact *Insight Development*
Phone *(001925) 244 2000*
www.zipuptheweb.com

WEB MONITOR AND SEARCH TOOL

Web Cleaner and Web Magnet

These programs let you block specific Web content and search for media files

The first of these products from Data Becker, Web Cleaner, lets you block unwanted material from the Web to your browser. It's easy to set up and the functional layout means you can spend less time reading manuals and more time browsing.

Web Cleaner monitors your browsing and gives you logfiles of the sites you've visited. You can then decide which sites are unsuitable to revisit, and block access to your hard drive from unsolicited downloads. In its capacity to block certain traffic, the program lets you avoid banner ads, pop-up windows and spam.

It'll also check your ISP email for messages, and a Web Spy feature checks your favourite sites for updates. Finally, a cookie manager lets certain data through from particular sites and blocks other types of data from others.

Web Cleaner lets you block unwanted Web content

The second product, Web Magnet, is an extremely useful program for searching the Net without launching your browser or your normal search engine. Once it finds a site, any relevant media – such as an image or soundfile with your keyword in its title – is downloaded onto your PC in a designated directory.

You need to remain loyal to your machine by checking the directory for viruses. If the program comes across a large multimedia file, it asks you whether you want to download it.

Web Magnet search for media files

Received files are attributed to three different galleries in Web Magnet according to type – images, movies or sound files.

The program works by sending your search string to a host of search engines. You can opt to avoid or add particular file types for download, and set the speed of the site search – if a site doesn't respond after a specified time, Web Magnet moves onto the next site. You can add search engines to the default list and exclude particular URLs.

Both of these programs have potential for the home user. Web Cleaner works efficiently, though the degree to which logfiles and statistics are produced appears a little unnecessary.

Web Cleaner is easy to set up and use, but it's a bit long-winded compared with software such as Adfilter (**www.adfilter.com**). As another piece of home use software, Web Magnet is superb. If you have to do a lot of searching on the Web for media files, it'll certainly lend you a helping hand.

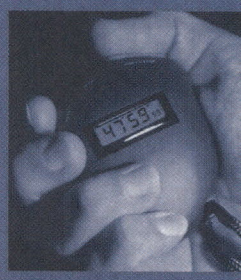
Charlie Young

★★★☆☆

Web Cleaner and Web Magnet

Price *Web Cleaner £19.99, Web Magnet £9.99*
Pros *User-friendly software*
Cons *Web Cleaner needs simplifying, Web Magnet could do with linking to a virus checker*
Contact *Data Becker*
Phone *(01420) 22707*
www.databecker.co.uk/system/index.html

eCommerce for you in just 48 hours...



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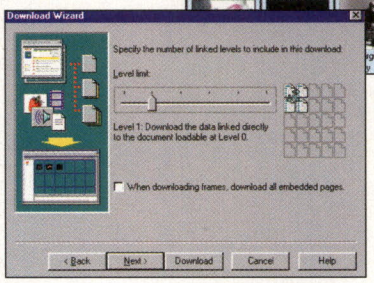
WEB DOWNLOAD TOOL

iCollect

This tool makes it easy to collect images, sound and video from the Web

Once you've scooped up your images, you can save them in a book and use the thumbnails for easy access

iCollect lets you download the contents of a Web page to your computer in four simple steps. The main target for this program is images, such as GIFs and JPEGs, but it also lets you download sound, video and text files from a Web page. You only get a digital manual for getting started, but the interface is standard and all the buttons are self-explanatory.



Using the wizard, you can select how many layers of a site you want to download

Installation is easy – it only takes two minutes of your time and 8.2Mb of memory on your hard drive. It doesn't affect your main system set up, so if you want to use it at work, you don't need to trouble your network manager.

You'll need Windows 95/98/NT on a Pentium PC, a version 3 copy of IE or Netscape and plenty of RAM.

At a basic level, you simply click on the download wizard, define the site you want to use, state the depth you want to go (see picture, above) and tell the program when you want to start downloading content.

Organising this content is straightforward – you use the 'books' in the left-hand panel to organise your collections. But make sure you don't go too deep into a site or you'll fill up your hard drive space, and you could run up a hefty phone bill in the process. Parents can use the program to block undesirable content from the Web.

iCollect lets you turn your machine into a server, which could be as an image or document library on a small network. You can also use password protection and print out your books.

If you're a webmaster, iCollect is a useful way to take a quick snapshot of your site and keep all the images in one place. You won't need to use this feature often, but it's useful when you're doing some major work on your Web site, or if you just want to keep a record of your progress.

When you're using this tool, you must be aware of the copyright laws in the UK. Taking images to use for your own amusement is fine, but it's illegal to use them on another site without the permission of the copyright owner.

iCollect is a useful tool that's easy to use. If you're a webmaster, or a collector of a particular kind of Web content, such as images, this program is recommended.

Mike Hales

★★★★☆

iCollect

Price *£48 (part of the Complete Web Studio 2 package)*
Pros *Easy to use, stable software*
Cons *No UK Web site, no support*
Contact *Sierra Home*
Phone *(001425) 649 9800*
www.sierrahome.com

MP3 ENCODER/ORGANISER

GMT JBox

Organise your CDs on your PC with this retro-styled MP3 encoder and player

The MP3 software market is already bustling with hundreds of players, rippers, encoders, decoders and combination packages that are all jostling for recognition and download popularity.

With this in mind, you might think Greenwich Mean Time has been a bit late in launching its JBox MP3 Jukebox. But, like all late to market products, the JBox has an added twist – Wurlitzer styling and an attractive retro-appeal.

While it's perfectly capable of ripping and playing MP3 tracks from the Web, JBox is primarily an encoder and organiser for your CDs. You can use the JBox Organiser to store all your favourite albums on your hard disk in MP3 format and have them waiting to be queued up via the hip jukebox interface.

You can store up to 1,000 CDs with this program, and filter them by genre into rock 'n' roll, pop, soul, or death punk skate thrash, depending on your mood. Installing the software is simple, and encoding is simply a question of pointing the JBox Organiser at a suitable CD drive and waiting.

Once you've encoded a CD, you can assign track listings using the popular CD Database at **www.cddb.com**. You'll also find guidelines on how to add cover art to each jukebox selection on the site. If the screen-consuming retro styling gets on your nerves after a while, you can always switch to the more sensible Pocket Player transport bar – this sits quietly in the corner of your desktop ready for use.

When you install Jbox, it asks you to disable the automatic playing of audio CDs to let the Organiser work smoothly. Unfortunately, audio CDs were invoked by the Windows 98 CD Player during encoding anyway, which successfully halts the process of ripping your tracks.

Crash messages, such as "Copying process was not completed due to errors" are less than helpful. You can't even use question marks and other punctuation in track listings.

Are your CDs spread around your desk collecting coffee stains? Time to get organised

The problem with the JBox is there are many free players and encoder/decoder programs on the market. These include the WinAmp players (**www.winamp.com**), the MP3Box (**www.MP3box.net**), FreeAmp (**www.freeamp.org**), and the highly rated Music Match Jukebox (**www.musicmatch.com**).

But if you're after a nice looking package with a *Happy Days* type of feel, and you don't mind paying £30 for it, you could certainly do worse than the JBox.

Dave Wilby

★★★☆☆

GMT JBox

Price *£29.95*
Pros *Looks cool. Safe way of storing your favourite CDs at work*
Cons *Heavy use could get expensive*
Contact *Greenwich Mean Time*
Phone *(01329) 825 468*
www.gmt-2000.com

The truth at last about changing ISP. It's hassle-free! Call us on 0800 056 2435

We have used several hosting companies over the years but none have approached the high standards set by NSL *Dr P.H. Johnson The Dedicated Partnership*

NSL are technically very competent, have hosted our server for over 3 years, and always provide 1st class professional service - *Gill Campbell,Marketing Director - Cortex*

Fastest servers in Scotland, fastest response to solving problems and technically the best guys I've come across. *David Blockley MD - The Internet Farm*

Outgrown your ISP and didn't realise?

Do you have an e-commerce solution that links your website into your Bank? Is your site as fast to browse as it should be? Do you have streaming video? Are you getting proper reports on your website visitors? Do you have an account manager who understands your business? If the answer to any of these questions is no, you should think about making the move to NSL NET.

28 Reasons to choose NSL NET:

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6. Award winning company, achieving both national and international recognition.
7. Database and programming expertise in-house to help you bring your website to life.
8. Video and sound broadcasting services.
9. In the vanguard of innovation, with constant product launches and service improvements.
10. Huge range of products.
11. Advanced network links your site directly to London, Manchester, Amsterdam, Paris, Washington DC, Silicon Valley and New York.
12. Web admin interface allowing you to control your account through simple web forms.
13. Advanced analysis of the visitors to your website.
14. We don't offer leased lines or dial-up so all our capacity is dedicated to our websites.
15. For your peace mind we have a network of closed circuit cameras around our facility and security guards on duty throughout the night.
16. Corporate member of Internet Society and follow their code of conduct.
17. Special partnership programme for web designers including sales referrals.
18. Bulk and reseller discounts available.
19. No penalties if you leave us.
20. Disaster recovery plan in place.
21. Full access to Perl for your own CGI scripts.
22. Range of free CGI scripts.
23. All planned maintenance between 6am and 8am to minimise disruption.
24. A local choice with offices in Edinburgh and London, and representation in Middle East.

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25. Your own dedicated account manager.
26. Guaranteed reliability of 99.5%, backed by compensation.
27. 24 hour service, 365 days a year.
28. Guaranteed response within 2 hours to any fault report or we pay you £50.

NSL NET Key Products and Prices

Small Business Package

Your own domain name (including all fees), 30MB of web space, CGI access, unlimited aliases and mail forwarding, advanced web interface to manage your account and reports on all your visitors. Cost options include discussion forum, site search engine, password protection for private areas of the site and FrontPage extensions. **From £189 p.a.**

Domain Name Registration

Register your domain name now. Includes unlimited mail and web forwarding and all NIC fees. **£65 p.a.**

Real Media Service

Add 5 streams of audio or video to your site for only **£600 per year.** One stream is required for each simultaneous viewer - buy more streams as you need them.

Generator

NSL NET is a Macromedia Authorised hosting provider. Generate your flash animations with live data from webforms or databases. We'll also help you with the server coding. **From £720 p.a.**

Mail List Management

Allow your customers to automatically add and remove themselves from your mail lists, either through web forms or mailing special addresses. Advanced security and management features. **From £199 per year.**

Colocated Server

You own dedicated server **from £250 per month.** Either supply your own rack mounted hardware or lease from us. The ideal choice for technically skilled companies who don't want to build their own data centre and arrange bandwidth.

Corporate Package

For customers requiring extra service a variety of Corporate Packages are available. Corporate customers have their own account manager, guaranteed levels of service, huge traffic limits suitable for major sites and advanced reporting on visitors to your site. **From £2,500 p.a.**

E-Commerce with NSL NET

NSL NET offers two different e-commerce packages. NSL Shop and NSL Clear which allow you to setup shop on the Internet and process payments automatically. These systems are currently powering many successful Internet businesses.

NSL Shop provides you with a database driven catalogue system, capable of coping with shops selling one or two items to thousands. A set of easy to use webforms allows unskilled staff to change price or product details without needing to know HTML or use an FTP programme.

A shopping basket system is included. This can handle complex delivery options, with different prices according to weight of products, where they are being sent to and by what speed of delivery. There's also a secure server for taking credit card details. Transactions are recorded in a database ready for import into any major spreadsheet or database. Orders can be sent to you in a PGP encrypted email or passed to NSL Clear. NSL Shop is £549 per year and includes a Small Business Package.

NSL Clear is an automated credit and debit card clearing system. This allows you to automatically process card orders from your site and receive the money directly into you bank account.

Cost is just 10p per transaction, with a minimum monthly fee of £25. Your Bank will also add their charges. Details of participating Banks available from us. Subject to status.

Faxback now on 0131 477 8223 or tel: 0800 056 2435

Please rush me more information about these NSL services

YOUR NAME

TITLE (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr) POSITION

ORGANISATION

ADDRESS

TEL FAX

EMAIL

- ❑ Small Business Package
- ❑ E-commerce Package
- ❑ Real Media Service
- ❑ Colocated Server
- ❑ Generator
- ❑ Mail List Management
- ❑ Corporate Package

❑ Please call me to discuss my programming requirements (my current ISP is.....)

IM1099

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Correspondence to NSL (Internet) Ltd, 26 Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LH, UK Tel +44 (0)131 477 8215 Fax: +44 (0)131 477 8223

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- Unlimited Email Accounts @yourdomain

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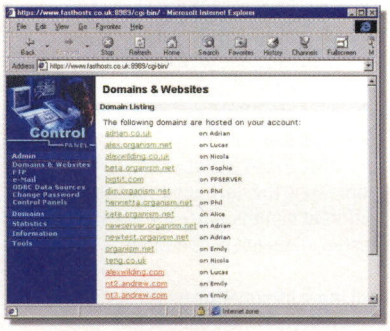

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EXCLUSIVE

provider lab

The biggest and best tests // Don't choose an ISP until you've read the results

Find out how the UK's top service providers score in *Internet Magazine*'s exclusive ISP lab tests. Every month we put the best ISPs through a rigorous set of performance tests, so check out how yours has scored. And for the most consistent ISP over the past six months, turn to page 149

The winner

CIX

CIX tops this month's charts, proving that its acquisition forays into the US market have done nothing to distract its attention from its faithful UK customer base.

Last month's surprise leader Icom-Web couldn't sustain its meteoric rise from 69th position in December, and has now fallen out of the top 10, down at 13. This leaves no free ISPs at the top of the tests, with the highest contender being Mirror Newspaper-backed ic24, up an impressive 15 positions to 11.

Ace Internet is back in the top 10 at number 6, and its consistently good results are rewarded with the top position in our six monthly tests.

Availability figures were erratic this month, with only five of the top 10 companies achieving perfect 100 per cent availability. This is in contrast to February, when the top eight providers all connected on the first attempt each time we tried.

Indeed, as in last month's tests, it is likely that with itsexceptional average web speeds, Direct Net @ccess could have pushed for top spot if it had improved on a disappointing 93.57 per cent availability. Must try harder.

This month's top mover is IPNet, up an impressive 46 places from last month's 62 and in danger of a nosebleed at 16. Internet for Business cracks the top 10, rising from a disappointing 22 to a credible ninth. Last month's highest climber conX couldn't hold the pace, and has dropped 30 positions this month from 19 to 49.

Several companies have had an appalling month. The biggest faller this month was Interalpha, dropping 66 positions from 32, stopping just short of the foot of the table at a lowly 98. Cheapnet will also be disappointed to find itself down 51 positions to 69. But perhaps most noticeable is the decline in fortunes of Viper. Last month's high-flyer at number 3 has plummeted 41 positions, thanks to an unacceptable availability figure of 91.97 per cent.

The foot of the table is a similar picture to last month, with the notable exception of the much-maligned Screaming.net, which this month has risen 25 places to 82nd. Credit where credit is due. The bottom positions are still taken by the usual players, including the disappointing Demon and Freeserve.

How we test

Our testing machines hold a list of ISPs to test. The system selects four Web sites and tests the download speed for each ISP on the list. When it reaches the bottom of the list, it picks four more sites and starts at the top again.

There are 20 sites on our test list: six from the UK, 11 from the US and three from continental Europe. These numbers are similar to the weightings we give different regions when we calculate the final results.

We look for pages that are unlikely to change over the test period. Pages with CGI or adverts are unsuitable because they're too likely to change. Government and academic sites are often used because their pages are more stable. If a site changes in the middle of a test sequence, we ignore the data and don't include it in the results.

Choosing test sites in the UK is a special problem because most sites are hosted by ISPs and their close associates, and it wouldn't be fair to allow an ISP to be tested on its own sites. For this reason we've to choose UK sites very carefully, and used Traceroute to check who hosts them. We have also chosen sites from different areas of the country, most of which are academic sites.

In the US the situation is easier, since there are more hosts and many of them are not closely associated with UK ISPs. We choose sites hosted on the Eastern seaboard, the West Coast, and in the country's heartland. For our continental sites we use one in France, one in Germany, and one in Scandinavia.

We usually change at least one site each month because it becomes unsuitable or unreliable. This means you have to be careful when you're comparing the download speeds for different months, since the sites tested might not be the same.

For more information on ISPs, visit www.internet-magazine.com /resource/isp

Uppers&downers

IPNET
Rockets 46 places from 62nd position to 16th.

BREATHE INTERNET
Jumps 29 positions from 81st to 52nd place.

DIRECT NET @CCESS
Charges into third place, up 10 places from last month's 13.

INTERALPHA
Plummets 66 positions to 98 from 32nd.

CHEAPNET
Drops 51 to 69th from an impressive 18th last time.

VIPER
Down to 41 from last month's creditable third.

ENTANET
Slides 26 positions to 31 from last month's fifth.

The only ISP tests that count

The *Internet Magazine* ISP tests are based on proven scientific testing principles. We make sure we connect to each ISP many times – which means we make thousands of calls.

The results produced by this extensive testing are then processed, resulting in the test analysis and ranking figures you see in these pages. At every stage, the results are checked to make sure they're accurate.

Please remember that these tests are only designed to examine the availability and speed of an ISP – we don't test their prices or technical support. For the lowdown on the complete set of services provided by the top 30 ISPs, you can get hold of our gigantic ISP of the Year feature from our Faxback service on page 155.

If you're not a
LUCENT VIP ISP Member
you **SHOULD** *be!*

tests

Key: Free | Subscription | Business

This month's best-performing ISPs, as tested in *Internet Magazine*'s labs

This Month	Last Month	ISP Name	Telephone	Availability (%)	Overall average Web speed (seconds)	Average UK Web sites (seconds)	Average US Web sites (seconds)	Average European sites (seconds)
1	4	CIX	(0181) 255 5050	100.00	10.37	9.31	10.15	14.88
2	9	CompuServe	(0840) 600 0800	100.00	10.59	9.28	10.22	16.77
3	13	Direct Net @ccess	(01232) 201 555	93.57	9.94	8.86	9.54	15.60
4	8	UUNet (Pipex Dial)	(0500) 474 739	100.00	10.69	9.26	10.19	17.98
5	7	Plugin	(0800) 783 9250	99.21	10.61	9.36	10.35	15.86
6	14	Ace Internet	(0705) 066 7423	99.31	10.69	9.94	10.05	16.72
7	11	U-Net	(0845) 330 8000	100.00	10.80	9.01	10.59	17.37
8	2	Gemsoft	(0800) 138 1177	96.92	10.47	9.96	9.95	15.09
9	22	Internet for Business	(01224) 333 370	98.43	10.73	9.34	10.56	15.86
10	15	Global Internet	(0870) 909 8041	100.00	10.98	9.26	11.09	15.46
11	26	ic24	(0870) 90 90 262	96.21	10.60	9.79	10.02	16.53
12	10	Interactive Web	(01926) 450 099	97.67	10.80	9.46	10.43	17.08
13	1	Icom-Web	(0800) 731 8419	94.77	10.49	9.56	10.16	15.30
14	23	Connecting Business	(0870) 870 1100	96.94	10.74	9.84	10.33	15.96
15	21	Pinnacle Internet	(0845) 200 1213	100.00	11.12	9.79	10.39	19.50
16	62	IPNet		98.44	11.00	10.09	10.78	15.03
17	24	Freedom To Surf	(0181) 881 2111	100.00	11.20	9.35	10.37	21.74
18	6	Swift Internet	(0845) 6060210	96.18	10.79	9.76	10.50	15.63
19	16	Kirion	(0171) 242 4555	99.21	11.16	9.95	10.95	16.03
20	37	REDNET	(01494) 513 333	99.31	11.23	9.53	11.28	16.00
21	27	Free-Online	(0870) 706 0504	100.00	11.36	9.99	11.02	17.49
22	40	Zen Internet	(01706) 713 714	98.45	11.19	9.84	11.04	16.14
23	31	Cygnet Internet Services	(0181) 880 4650	100.00	11.38	10.67	10.60	18.15
24	17	Cable & Wireless Internet	(0800) 092 3013	96.92	11.06	9.51	10.81	17.23
25	28	CableNet	(01424) 830 9000	100.00	11.44	9.76	10.87	19.85
26	30	Wyenet	(01989) 762 476	100.00	11.45	9.95	10.95	18.92
27	20	Direct Connection	(0800) 072 0000	98.43	11.30	10.01	11.10	16.36
28	42	I-Way Soho	(0171) 734 5734	100.00	11.48	12.53	10.22	15.91
29	46	Sonnet Internet	(0171) 891 2000	98.45	11.32	9.85	11.21	16.44
30	47	Portland Communications	(0870) 741 0994	99.31	11.46	10.35	11.02	17.45
31	5	ENTANET	(0500) 368 263	92.08	10.68	9.94	10.05	16.70
32	53	btclick.com	(0800) 800 001	100.00	11.62	10.25	11.39	17.13
33	29	Bun.com	(0845) 306 3636	99.21	11.54	10.30	11.29	16.75
34	12	Cable & Wireless Lite	(0800) 092 3001	96.92	11.31	9.80	10.99	17.76
35	49	BT Internet	(0800) 800 001	100.00	11.68	10.26	11.39	17.66
36	38	DIALNet Connect	(0800) 881 881	99.21	11.59	10.40	11.26	17.14
37	57	Peoplesnet	(0171) 691 9993	99.31	11.61	9.94	11.74	15.81
38	55	SoftProg NET	(0181) 788 0656	97.64	11.43	10.28	10.93	17.86
39	56	Frontier Internet Services	(0171) 536 9090	97.60	11.44	9.96	11.07	18.14
40	48	Legend Internet	(01274) 743 500	100.00	11.79	10.40	11.36	18.59
41	61	Mistral Internet	(0800) 328 7253	97.64	11.55	9.37	11.82	16.46
42	44	Newnet	(07000) 639 638	99.21	11.75	10.54	11.49	16.93
43	39	Madasafish	(09010) 222324	99.21	11.80	11.39	11.19	16.63
44	3	Viper	(07050) 345071	91.97	10.94	9.57	10.79	15.98
45	65	LineOne	(0906) 302 0100	97.60	11.62	9.57	11.73	17.14
46	54	NetDirect Internet	(0800) 731 3311	100.00	11.93	9.74	11.56	20.75
47	71	Intonet	(0181) 941 9195	99.31	11.96	9.74	11.77	19.74
48	69	Prestel Online	(0990) 223 300	100.00	12.05	10.27	11.76	19.12
49	19	conX	(0900) 777 0055	100.00	12.07	10.08	11.85	19.39
50	66	Newbury Internet	(01635) 569 123	97.67	11.79	10.12	11.96	15.79
51	98	Aviators Network	(0700) 284 2867	96.94	11.71	9.40	12.07	16.54
52	81	Breathe Internet	(0800) 298 3030	96.21	11.63	9.65	11.55	18.02

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This month's best-performing ISPs, as tested in *Internet Magazine*'s labs

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This Month	Last Month	ISP Name	Telephone	Availability (%)	Overall average Web speed (seconds)	Average UK Web sites (seconds)	Average US Web sites (seconds)	Average European sites (seconds)
53	51	London Web Communications	(0800) 026 8306	93.33	11.29	9.43	11.14	17.85
54	75	WorldWide Web Services	(01784) 898 800	90.00	10.96	9.60	10.59	17.24
55	78	Power Internet	(01908) 605 188	96.00	11.72	10.11	11.64	16.98
56	34	AIC-Entanet	(01279) 306 677	94.11	11.55	9.72	11.07	19.89
57	36	UKPeople	(0800) 542 5200	99.21	12.22	11.04	11.89	17.73
58	77	Ideal Internet Services	(01942) 209 578	100.00	12.33	10.20	12.20	19.50
59	63	Moonlight	(01276) 856 868	99.21	12.24	10.09	12.40	17.74
60	59	The Internet Business	(01232) 424 190	100.00	12.36	10.12	12.56	17.85
61	74	inweb	(0845) 606 2014	100.00	12.36	10.85	11.93	19.43
62	95	Wave Rider Internet	(0121) 603 3888	100.00	12.40	9.44	12.88	18.40
63	82	Abel Gratis	(0906) 680 4444	95.94	11.92	10.30	11.84	17.26
64	25	Force 9	(0870) 705 8000	100.00	12.45	10.01	13.07	16.01
65	41	Strongnet	(01703) 866 006	98.44	12.27	9.29	12.95	17.13
66	33	Avante Internet	(01283) 545 000	100.00	12.52	10.65	12.55	17.91
67	83	DNA Internet Services	(01604) 670 717	97.67	12.23	10.59	12.21	17.32
68	87	HiWay	(01635) 573 300	95.14	11.93	9.97	11.93	17.75
69	18	Cheapnet	(08705) 168 160	99.21	12.46	10.22	12.80	17.16
70	70	Uninet Internet Services	(01491) 614 840	90.57	11.47	10.15	10.63	20.46
71	35	VAS-NET	(01732) 866 529	99.21	12.57	10.12	13.07	16.94
72	100	UK Online	(0845) 333 4567	97.65	12.42	11.85	12.11	16.00
73	86	NetDirect Online	(0800) 731 3311	100.00	12.74	10.89	12.61	19.03
74	85	Firstnet	(0113) 294 4224	96.94	12.37	10.02	12.21	20.42
75	89	Netkonect	(0800) 163 0000	85.12	10.90	10.09	10.49	15.83
76	43	SAQ Internet	(0870) 737 7700	99.10	12.70	10.39	12.81	18.97
77	60	Easynet	(0171) 681 4444	96.92	12.49	11.31	12.53	15.78
78	67	Which?-Online	(0645) 830 240	100.00	12.89	10.10	13.90	15.18
79	52	Baynet	(01222) 256 401	94.87	12.34	9.82	12.88	16.66
80	90	Primex	(01908) 643 597	100.00	13.06	13.57	12.39	15.51
81	91	ClaraNet	(0800) 358 2828	87.58	11.46	9.92	11.27	17.24
82	107	Screaming.net (BT line)	(0800) 376 5262	88.81	11.63	10.35	11.46	16.47
83	96	ICM Netserv	(0800) 614 581	97.60	12.83	10.97	12.98	17.58
84	92	CommUnity Internet	(01865) 856 000	100.00	13.16	10.45	13.67	18.23
85	94	Eclipse Networking	01392 202 345	97.64	12.85	11.31	12.40	20.20
86	68	Virgin Net	(0500) 558 800	96.92	12.76	10.00	13.75	15.06
87	88	Internet UK	(0845) 070 0006	93.33	12.31	9.61	12.42	19.76
88	99	Freebeeb	(0808) 100 4950	95.94	12.74	10.89	12.61	19.03
89	64	Nildram	(0800) 496 2903	91.30	12.21	12.15	11.42	17.15
90	101	Gifford Internet Services	(0117) 939 7722	95.94	12.89	13.37	11.59	19.25
91	102	Netscape Online	(0800) 923 0009	83.25	11.20	9.62	11.15	16.16
92	72	Poptel	(0171) 923 9465	95.68	12.92	10.72	13.00	19.05
93	84	UK2Net	(0171) 538 0253	96.18	13.03	10.96	13.10	18.76
94	73	Technocom	(01753) 714 200	96.52	13.08	10.28	13.72	17.63
95	97	Onyx	(0345) 715 715	100.00	13.59	12.57	12.41	23.73
96	80	Cerbernet	(0171) 360 8000	91.42	12.48	12.44	11.52	18.34
97	105	Zoo Internet	(0181) 961 7000	91.97	12.59	9.88	13.36	16.15
98	32	Interalpha	(01703) 422 8444	100.00	13.79	11.19	14.06	19.95
99	50	Telinco Internet Services	(0800) 542 0800	96.92	13.41	10.73	13.63	20.20
100	103	Enterprise	(01624) 696 666	100.00	14.01	13.52	13.42	19.04
101	45	FDD	(01865) 321003	92.70	13.01	10.11	13.64	17.97
102	76	Paradise Internet	(01256) 414 863	99.21	13.94	10.39	14.97	18.40
103	93	Netcom Internet	(0800) 980 9107	96.12	13.53	10.82	13.95	19.16
104	104	Cable Internet	(0500) 500 100	92.80	13.56	10.95	13.69	20.61
105	106	CYBERphile Internet	(01543) 454 840	100.00	14.62	12.47	14.97	19.03
106	108	Demon	(0181) 371 1234	100.00	15.04	12.77	15.67	18.06
107	109	Discovery	(01203) 364 400	93.57	14.14	12.61	13.91	20.11
108	110	Freeserve	(0870) 901 6000	82.64	12.71	9.79	11.79	26.94
109	111	Pavilion Internet	(08453) 335 000	99.31	15.50	14.74	15.00	20.82
110	112	Vossnet	(01753) 737 800	90.57	14.79	13.59	14.60	19.53
111	79	FreeUK	(08453) 555 555	71.34	11.77	10.15	11.42	18.76
112	113	WSS Internet Access	(01793) 420 764	99.21	17.58	15.85	17.13	25.50
113	114	Pipemedia OnLine	(01455) 828 218	100.00	17.79	13.91	18.09	27.59

How the performance tests work

The *Internet Magazine* provider labs tests are designed to give you all the information you need on the speed and availability of ISPs. Every month, our system accesses each of the ISPs on the list many times. Our system repeatedly checks:

- The availability of the ISP. How easy is it to make the connection? How often are the ISP's modems engaged?
- The speed of the connection. How long do a number of popular Web pages take to download?

To rank the ISPs, we calculate the geometric mean of the availability and average Web performance.

- This month's tests ran over the period 4-15 January 2000.

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How the ISPs performed over the past six months

Find out how your service provider has done in our unique chart...

Free Subscription Business

	Provider	Phone	URL
1	Ace Internet	(0705) 066 7423	www.ace-internet.co.uk
2	CompuServe	(0840) 600 0800	www.compuserve.co.uk
3	Cable & Wireless Lite	(0800) 092 3001	www.cwcom.net
4	Newnet	(07000) 639 638	www.newnet.co.uk/home
5	UUNet (Pipex Dial)	(0500) 474 739	www.uk.uu.net
6	Gemsoft	(0800) 138 1177	www.gemsoft.net
7	Cable & Wireless Internet	(0800) 092 3013	www.cwcom.net
8	Direct Net @ccess	(01232) 201 555	www.d-n-a.net
9	Internet for Business	(01224) 333 370	www.ifb.net
10	Global Internet	(0870) 909 8041	www.global.net.uk
11	Uninet Internet Services	(01491) 614 840	www.uninet.co.uk
12	ENTANET	(0500) 368 263	www.enta.net
13	U-Net	(0845) 330 8000	www.u-net.net
14	Pinnacle Internet	(0845) 200 1213	www.pncl.co.uk
15	VAS-NET	(01732) 866 529	www.vas-net.net
16	DIALNet Connect	(0800) 881 881	www.dialnet.com
17	Icom-Web	(0800) 731 8419	www.icom-web.com
18	CableNet	(01424) 830 9000	www.cablenet.net
19	Sonnet Internet	(0171) 891 2000	www.sonnet.co.uk
20	Freedom To Surf	(0181) 881 2111	www.freedom2surf.net
21	Viper	(07050) 345071	www.viper.co.uk
22	Direct Connection	(0800) 072 0000	www.dircon.net
23	London Web Communications	(0800) 026 8306	www.londonweb.net
24	Netkonect	(0800) 163 0000	www.netkonect.co.uk
25	Mistral Internet	(0800) 328 7253	www.mistral-uk.net
26	Internet UK	(0845) 070 0006	sales@internet-uk.net
27	Strongnet	(01703) 866 006	www.strongnet.co.uk
28	inweb	(0845) 606 2014	www.inweb.net.uk
29	Portland Communications	(0870) 741 0994	www.portland.co.uk
30	Cheapnet	(08705) 168 160	www.cheapnet.co.uk
31	NetDirect Internet	(0800) 731 3311	www.netdirect.net.uk
32	The Internet Business	(01232) 424 190	www.tibus.net
33	Nildram	(0800) 496 2903	www.nildram.net
34	Power Internet	(01908) 605 188	www.powernet.co.uk
35	Madasafish	(09010) 222324	www.madasafish.co.uk
36	REDNET	(01494) 513 333	www.red.net
37	AIC-Entanet	(01279) 306 677	www.aic.co.uk
38	Which?-Online	(0645) 830 240	www.which.net
39	Avante Internet	(01283) 545 000	www.avante-uk.net
40	SoftProg NET	(0181) 788 0656	www.softprog.net
41	Interalpha	(01703) 422 8444	www.interalpha.net
42	Cygnet Internet Services	(0181) 880 4650	www.cygnet.co.uk
43	Swift Internet	(0845) 6060210	www.swiftinter.net
44	Free-Online	(0870) 706 0504	www.free-online.net
45	Interactive Web	(01926) 450 099	www.wwwuk.net
46	HiWay	(01635) 573 300	www.hiway.co.uk
47	Legend Internet	(01274) 743 500	www.legend.co.uk
48	Virgin Net	(0500) 558 800	www.virgin.net
49	Prestel Online	(0990) 223 300	www.prestel.co.uk
50	Plugin	(0800) 783 9250	www.plugin.co.uk
51	Intonet	(0181) 941 9195	www.intonet.co.uk
52	Peoplesnet	(0171) 691 9993	www.tianet.com
53	BT Internet	(0800) 800 001	www.btinternet.com
54	Primex	(01908) 643 597	www.primex.co.uk
55	Cerbernet	(0171) 360 8000	www.cerbernet.net
56	Breathe Internet	(0800) 298 3030	www.breathe.net
57	Force 9	(0870) 705 8000	www.force9.net
58	WorldWide Web Services	(01784) 898 800	www.webs.co.uk
59	ICM Netserv	(0800) 614 581	www.netserv.net
60	Abel Gratis	(0906) 680 4444	www.abelgratis.com
61	Frontier Internet Services	(0171) 536 9090	www.ftech.co.uk
62	CommUnity Internet	(01865) 856 000	www.community.net.uk
63	Easynet	(0171) 681 4444	www.easynet.co.uk
64	UK Online	(0845) 333 4567	www.ukonline.net
65	Telinco Internet Services	(0800) 542 0800	www.telinco.co.uk
66	UK2Net	(0171) 538 0253	www.uk2net.com
67	Paradise Internet	(01256) 414 863	www.pins.co.uk
68	Freeserve	(0870) 901 6000	www.freeserve.net
69	Pavilion Internet	(08453) 335 000	www.pavilion.co.uk
70	Aviators Network	(0700) 284 2867	www.aviators.net
71	SAQ Internet	(0870) 737 7700	www.saqnet.co.uk
72	LineOne	(0906) 302 0100	www.lineone.net
73	ClaraNet	(0800) 358 2828	www.clara.net
74	DNA Internet Services	(01604) 670 717	www.dna-is.com
75	Moonlight	(01276) 856 868	www.moon-light.co.uk
76	I-Way Soho	(0171) 734 5734	www.i-way.co.uk
77	Poptel	(0171) 923 9465	www.poptel.org.uk
78	Firstnet	(0113) 294 4224	www.firstnet.co.uk#
79	btclick.com	(0800) 800 001	www.btclick.com
80	Technocom	(01753) 714 200	www.technocom.net
81	Eclipse Networking	01392 202 345	www.eclipse.co.uk
82	Gifford Internet Services	(0117) 939 7722	www.gifford.co.uk
83	Ideal Internet services	(01942) 209 578	www.idealnet.co.uk
84	Demon	(0181) 371 1234	www.demon.net
85	Netcom Internet	(0800) 980 9107	www.netcom.net.uk
86	Onyx	(0345) 715 715	www.onyxnet.co.uk
87	UKPeople	(0800) 542 5200	www.ukpeople.net
88	IPNet		www.ipnet.co.uk
89	Newbury Internet	(01635) 569 123	www.newbury.net
90	FreeUK	(08453) 555 555	www.freeuk.net
91	Cable Internet	(0500) 500 100	www.cableinet.co.uk
92	Wave Rider Internet	(0121) 603 3888	www.waverider.co.uk
93	CYBERphile Internet	(01543) 454 840	www.cyberphile.co.uk
94	Zoo Internet	(0181) 961 7000	www.zoo.co.uk
95	Vossnet	(01753) 737 800	www.vossnet.co.uk
96	Baynet	(01222) 256 401	www.baynet.co.uk
97	Pipemedia OnLine	(01455) 828 218	www.pipemedia.co.uk
98	Discovery	(01203) 364 400	www.discover.co.uk
99	Enterprise	(01624) 696 666	www.enterprise.net
100	WSS Internet Access	(01793) 420 764	www.WSkiSoft.co.uk
101	Screaming.net (BT line)	(0800) 376 5262	www.screaming.net

Top performers in the past six months

Every month we produce a table showing how the ISPs have performed over the last six months. This is created by averaging the monthly results. The table only includes ISPs that have figured in our monthly tables in every one of the past six months. Some providers aren't included because we only began testing them recently. Others haven't made it because of problems testing them in at least one of these months. Exclusion from this table is no reflection on the quality of the ISP's service.

The results

For the first time, over a hundred providers have qualified for our six-month tests. Heading the pack is business specialist Ace Internet, thanks to a consistent presence near the top of our monthly charts. Last month's 'one-two' from C&W with its Lite free service and full subscription package has been split, with the services falling to third and seventh respectively.

Strongnet finally lost its unblemished record for availability this month with a figure of 98.44 per cent, leaving only Global Internet in 10th spot and lowly Pipemedia Online at 97 with 100 per cent availability over the past six months.

Unfortunately Screaming.net's impressive 25 position climb in this month's test was just a blip in an otherwise disappointing six-months for the company, which is reflected in its ongoing bottom position at 101st in the six-month chart.

Calculations

Each month, as well as adding the new data in from the current monthly tests, we drop the data for the monthly results seven months ago. This removal often has as much influence on the six month rankings as the addition of the new data.

To make sure that each month is of roughly equal value, the download speed figures for past months are adjusted using a mathematical formula so they conform to the numerical spreads we get from our current tests.

This adjustment allows us to produce a worthwhile average across the entire six-month period. If you're looking for consistency from your service provider, these are the results to watch.

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This month's best performing hosting companies

	Host Name	Host URL	UK Web throughput (kbps)	Availability
1	NewNet	www.newnet.co.uk	772.06	99.90%
2	Inweb Networks	www.inweb.net.uk	745.92	99.71%
3	Intensive Networks Ltd	www.intensive.net	696.25	99.95%
4	Nildram	www.nildram.net	687.49	99.83%
5	easynet	www.easynet.co.uk	685.58	99.98%
6	VBCnet	www.vbc.net	653.73	99.56%
7	Wessex Net	www.wessex.net	651.84	99.50%
8	Zeronet	www.zeronet.co.uk	649.95	99.96%
9	Lexology	www.lexology.co.uk	624.74	98.77%
10	NetBenefit	www.netbenefit.co.uk	611.57	99.88%
11	Caberfeidh UK Ltd	www.caberfeidh.co.uk	594.74	99.88%
12	Net Direct	www.netdirect.net.uk	591.88	99.88%
13	Direct Connection	www.dircon.net	562.76	99.79%
14	Virtual Internet	www.vi.net	540.91	99.83%
15	Freedom To Surf	www.freedom2surf.net	538.89	99.81%
16	Frontier Internet Services	www.ftech.co.uk	528.08	99.98%
17	Technocom PLC	www.technocom.net	523.2	100.00%
18	Gemsoft	www.gemsoft.net	520.02	99.96%
19	Mistral Internet	www.new.mistral.co.uk	500.07	99.21%
20	GX Networks	www.gxn.net	495.63	99.00%
21	Demon Internet	www.demon.net	444.63	99.65%
22	ClaraNet Ltd	www.clara.net	424.05	99.63%
23	Paradise Internet Network Services	www.pins.co.uk	411.57	99.87%
24	WebWorlds	www.webworlds.co.uk	409.64	95.11%
25	Egg	www.eggconnect.net	395.65	99.65%
26	Newbury Internet Services	www.newbury.net	389.83	99.93%
27	FDD	www.fdd.co.uk	377.65	99.48%
28	Netcom UK	www.netcom.net.uk	371.51	99.94%
29	Akitanet	www.akitanet.co.uk	341.12	99.56%
30	TWF Corporate Solution	www.twf.net	338.15	99.56%
31	UUNET UK	www.uk.uu.net	334.74	95.53%
32	Cybercity Internet	www.cyber-city.co.uk	329.15	99.17%
33	Corpex	www.corpex.com	313.88	99.94%
34	K-web Internet	www.k-web.co.uk	311.72	99.46%
35	Hotlinks Internet Services	www.hotlinks.co.uk	311.23	99.69%
36	Netcentric Solutions Ltd	www.netcentric.co.uk	307.13	99.96%
37	Onyx Internet	www.onyxnet.co.uk	305.06	99.58%
38	Telinco	www.telinco.net	297.02	99.83%
39	Quik Internet North East England	www.ne.quik.co.uk	291.96	99.92%
40	Alkazar Internet	www.alkazar.net	280.95	99.81%
41	Just Space	www.justspace.com	279.52	99.92%
42	Magic Moments	www.magic-moments.com	273.63	99.98%
43	Digiserve	www.digiserve.co.uk	272.74	99.73%
44	U-NET	www.u-net.net	270.47	99.88%
45	Searley Data Services	www.searley.net	263.72	98.86%
46	UK Business Internet	www.ukbusinessinternet.co.uk	260	98.61%
47	Netcetera	www.inetc.net	243.66	99.79%
48	Abel Internet	www.abel.net.uk	240.61	98.73%
49	.netkonect	www.netkonect.net	219.45	94.26%
50	Cocoon Internet Services	www.cocoon.co.uk	200.19	99.92%
51	CondorIS.Net	www.condoris.net	199.4	98.00%
52	Ace Internet	www.ace-internet.co.uk	196.68	99.56%
53	Pavilion Internet	www.pavilion.co.uk	195.13	99.88%
54	Worldwide Web Services	www.webs.co.uk	194.08	99.50%
55	Voyager Internet Uk	www.voyager.net.uk	190.99	98.06%
56	Newton Solutions Ltd	www.newtonsols.net	190.35	99.88%
57	OKChicken	www.okchicken.com	184.75	99.40%
58	IDnet	www.idnet.net.uk	178.39	99.73%
59	Cheapnet Ltd	www.cheapnet.co.uk	175.12	99.61%
60	Premier internet 2000	www.pi2000.net	172.27	85.16%
61	Valdi Internet	www.valdi.net	171.07	99.52%
62	Trinite	www.trinite.co.uk	170.85	99.83%
63	NDCG Online	www.ndcg.co.uk	170.72	97.48%
64	LEOnet Ltd	www.leonet.ltd.uk	169.84	99.69%
65	York UK Hosting	www.york-uk.com	167.07	97.86%
66	BT WebWorld	www.btwebworld.co.uk	163.11	99.11%
67	Metronet	www.metronet.co.uk	160.91	100.00%
68	Community internet plc	www.community.co.uk	160.02	99.73%
69	STRONGNET	www.strongnet.net	158.28	98.42%
70	Scotland Online	www.scotland.net	158.15	99.94%
71	Intuitiv (Internet Services) Ltd	www.intuitiv.co.uk	158	100.00%
72	Prestel On-line	www.prestel.co.uk	152.2	99.94%
73	Charis Internet Services	www.charis.net	151.6	99.65%
74	Cherryblue Internet Ltd	www.cherryblue.com	151.57	98.44%
75	Plus Net	www.plus.net.uk	151.41	99.46%
76	Church Net UK	www.churchnet.org.uk	149.24	79.34%
77	EntWeb	www.entweb.co.uk	148.53	97.98%
78	DSC	www.dsc.net	148.27	99.73%
79	Bucks Net	www.bucks.net	147.63	99.77%
80	Teleregion	www.teleregion.co.uk	146.7	99.75%
81	Datanet International	www.data.net.uk	142.58	99.50%
82	Sonnet Internet Ltd	www.sonnet.co.uk	140.65	99.65%
83	Wave Rider Internet	www.waverider.net.uk	140.49	99.61%
84	IFB	www.ifb.net	132.44	91.75%
85	Shared Knowledge	www.sharedknowledge.net	127.83	99.98%
86	Server World	www.serverworld.net	125.27	99.90%
87	Cygnet Internet Solutions	www.cygnet.co.uk	123.52	99.77%
88	gradwell dot com Limited	www.gradwell.com	122.61	99.65%
89	PLiG	www2.plig.net	121.66	99.75%
90	London Web	www.londonweb.co.uk	121.37	99.77%
91	Vital Online Ltd	www.vital.co.uk	121.33	99.21%
92	Research Machines	www.rmplc.co.uk	120.45	99.81%
93	Exploit Information Technology Ltd	www.exploit.co.uk	117.11	99.65%
94	Studio 24	www.studio24.net	115.71	99.20%
95	I-Way Limited	www.i-way.co.uk	115.61	97.26%
96	Alcom Internetix	www.alcom.co.uk	113.19	87.00%

This month's best performing hosting companies

	Host Name	Host URL	UK Web throughput (Kbps)	Availability
97	Tecc Ltd	www.tecc.co.uk	112.4	99.73%
98	Wealdown Computer Services	www.wealdown.com	111.38	98.91%
99	V-Host Internet Solutions Ltd	www.vhost.uk.net	110.93	93.47%
100	Kingston Internet	www.kingston-internet.net	108.9	99.85%
101	Shellnet	www.shellnet.co.uk	107.13	98.09%
102	Polyspaston Ltd	www.polyspaston.com	105.35	99.92%
103	The Web Factory	www.webfactory.co.uk	105.35	99.58%
104	Myratech	www.myratech.co.uk	104.98	99.90%
105	Architec	www.architec.co.uk	104.79	99.78%
106	UKIP	www.ukip.co.uk	104.78	95.51%
107	edNET	www.ednet.co.uk	104.49	99.71%
108	Triangle Multimedia Limited	www.triangle-multimedia.co.uk	95.88	96.51%
109	Netlink Internet Services	www.netlink.co.uk	93.03	99.06%
110	Zetnet Internet Service	www.zetnet.co.uk	92.09	98.86%
111	Thames Global Internet Services	www.tgis.co.uk	89.24	92.53%
112	Cerbernet Ltd	www.cerbernet.net	88.47	99.71%
113	Calligrafix	www.calligrafix.co.uk	87.7	98.61%
114	Atlas Internet	www.atlas.net.uk	87.29	99.36%
115	REDNET	www.red.net	85.98	99.83%
116	Soft Options UK	www.softopt.co.uk	85.82	99.83%
117	Internet Central	www.netcentral.co.uk	85.7	95.57%
118	ENTANET	www.enta.net	82.54	98.59%
119	East Midlands Network (EMNET)	www.emnet.co.uk	80.38	99.23%
120	Club24 Internet	www.club24.co.uk	79.96	99.96%
121	Madhouse Net	www.madhousenet.co.uk	75.57	99.85%
122	PSINet UK Ltd	www.uk.psi.net	75.1	99.69%
123	Netalia Internet	www.netalia.com	70.82	99.02%
124	Cloud Nine	www.cloud-nine.com	67.04	99.75%
125	Fasthosts Internet Ltd	www.fasthosts.com	58.4	94.82%
126	Easyspace Ltd	www.easyspace.com	58.03	97.05%
127	Timewarp	www.timewarp.co.uk	57.66	95.74%
128	UK Fast Hosting	www.ukfast.co.uk	57.07	95.69%
129	Global Gold Network Ltd	www.globalgold.co.uk	51.45	99.98%
130	Tripod UK	www.tripod.co.uk	51.22	99.90%
131	PlugIn.co.uk Limited	www.plugin.co.uk	46.07	99.67%
132	Ultraspeed UK Limited	www.ultraspeed.co.uk	43.86	99.30%
133	AIC-Entanet	www.aic.co.uk/entanet	43.84	99.96%
134	AiNET	www.ainet.com	37.53	96.77%
135	Data Link Internet	www.data-link.net	37.13	99.85%
136	"NetMint, LLC"	www.netmint.com	36.22	99.17%
137	Stayfree Internet	www.stayfree.co.uk	35.47	99.75%
138	Five Elements	www.five-elements.com	34.89	98.31%
139	Legend Internet	www.legend.co.uk	33.4	99.83%
140	Far Networks	www.far.net	32.38	98.86%
141	VillageNet	www.villagenet.com	31.82	99.29%
142	LDS Technology Ltd	www.lds.co.uk	30.65	91.85%
143	UVNET	www.uv.net	30	99.42%
144	Design Heaven	www.designheaven.com	29.5	99.04%
145	WebAdvantage Inc.	www.webadvantage.net	27.49	97.40%
146	Andover Online	www.andover.co.uk	27.32	99.96%
147	Enigma	www.ematic.net	26.48	98.57%
148	Hyperreal Networks	www.hyperreal.net	26.45	98.49%
149	Nethosting Ltd.	www.nhcore.net	25.98	99.38%
150	D.Net	www.dnet.it	25.97	99.02%
151	ME-NET!	www.me-net.net	25.91	95.94%
152	Devilnet UK Ltd	www.devilnet.co.uk	25.74	98.11%
153	CNH Technologies LLC	www.cnhtech.com	24.5	99.75%
154	Cybase Ltd	www.cybase.co.uk	16.5	95.80%
155	WinNet	www.win-uk.net	15.06	97.98%
156	Webfuture	www.webfuture.co.uk	14.39	99.94%
157	Versus.NET	www.versus.net	14.2	54.93%
158	Stratus Net	www.stratus.net	13.22	99.67%
159	modus	www.modus.co.uk	12.12	88.60%
160	Apanet	www.apanet.com	12.03	99.19%
161	Merula	www.merula.net	9.17	99.73%
162	iVerse	www.iverse.com	8.44	99.47%
163	Userve UK	www.userve.co.uk	7.51	98.18%
164	NUX	www.caines.co.uk	6.59	99.94%
165	Orchid Internet	www.orchidinternet.co.uk	6.11	99.67%
166	On The Spot	www.eyecare2000.co.uk	5.95	97.75%
167	Gibnet Limited	www.gibnet.gi	5.63	96.38%

Hosting performance tests

How is your Web host performing? Does your site download quickly or struggle down the wire? Together with Zeus Technologies, we've tested 167 Web hosting companies.

Top of the heap this month is Fareham-based NewNet, with a seasonally affected top speed of 772.06kbps and 99.9 per cent availability. The top 10 has a new look because of two new entrants.

Intensive Networks is a strong new entry in third place and Lexology comes straight in at number nine. This month's top climber is Onyx Internet, which leaps an amazing 83 places to 37th.

Several hosts lost a lot of ground in this month, but their tumbles were dwarfed by the slide of PSINet UK, which plummets 77 places to a lowly 122 place thanks to a poor throughput figure. Another new entrant, Gibnet Ltd, saves the blushes of On The Spot by finishing at the bottom of the table.

Measuring potential

Our top throughput figures are often over 1,000kbps, yet modems rarely manage more than 5kbps. The idea is, if you can download at 1,000kbps on a high bandwidth connection, it's the equivalent of 200 people downloading at 5kbps.

Many of our test page files are from the host companies' own pages. Not all the hosts' clients will get this level of performance, but if a host can't get its own pages to download perfectly, it's unlikely to offer anything better for its clients.

How we do it

The rankings are based on transfer speed – how fast files can be downloaded from the host server to our test machines. There are five test machines in the UK, plus a check machine in the US.

We measure data throughput when downloading a file within a specified size range. We choose images and not HTML files as they're far less likely to have been parsed or dynamically generated. Poor performance is usually the result of limited or overloaded bandwidth, or overloaded hardware/software.

The second figure in the table shows the availability of the host server. Our test system tries to contact the host every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day – nearly 3,000 tests a month. The availability figure tells you how often it gets through.

The tests ran over the period 1-19 January 2000. For more details, and to find out how the current tests are going, visit **www.webperf.net**.

More about the company behind the Web hosting tests

The *Internet Magazine* Web host tests are carried out by Zeus Technology, which provides Web hosting companies and ISPs with high performance, easy to use, feature rich Web server software. Zeus Technology has crafted the fastest and most scaleable Web server software in the world, providing mission critical reliability to its customers. Designed for large-scale I-commerce solutions, the company's products contain the strongest levels of security available. Zeus Technology and *Internet Magazine* are committed to delivering the best Web host service testing in the UK. For more details, see **www.zeustechnology.com**.

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Note: The lower the number, the older the article.
New articles to the service are highlighted in red.

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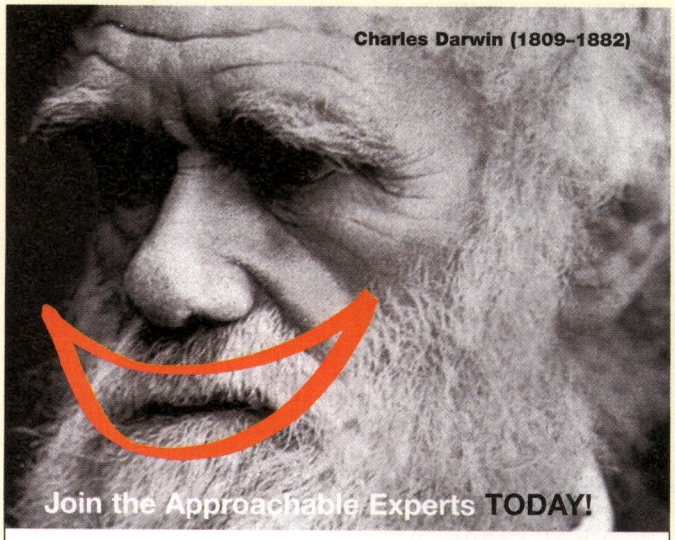

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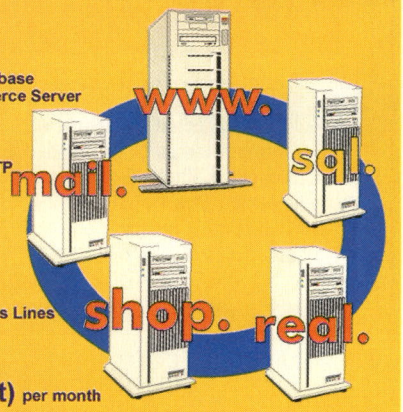

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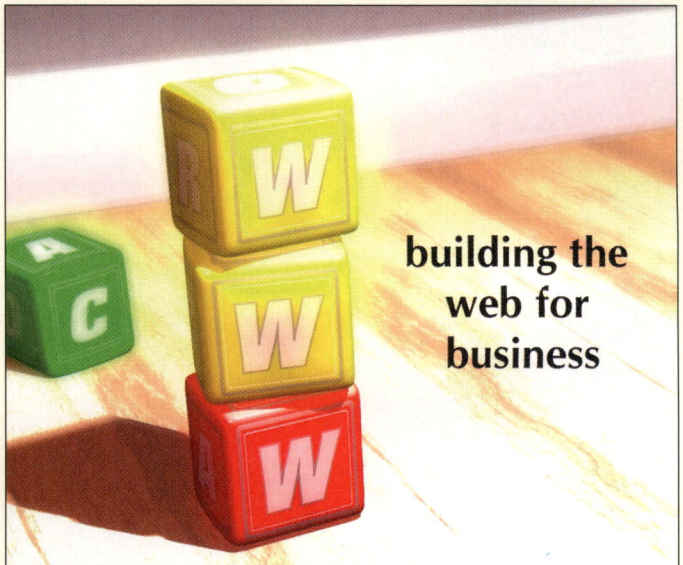

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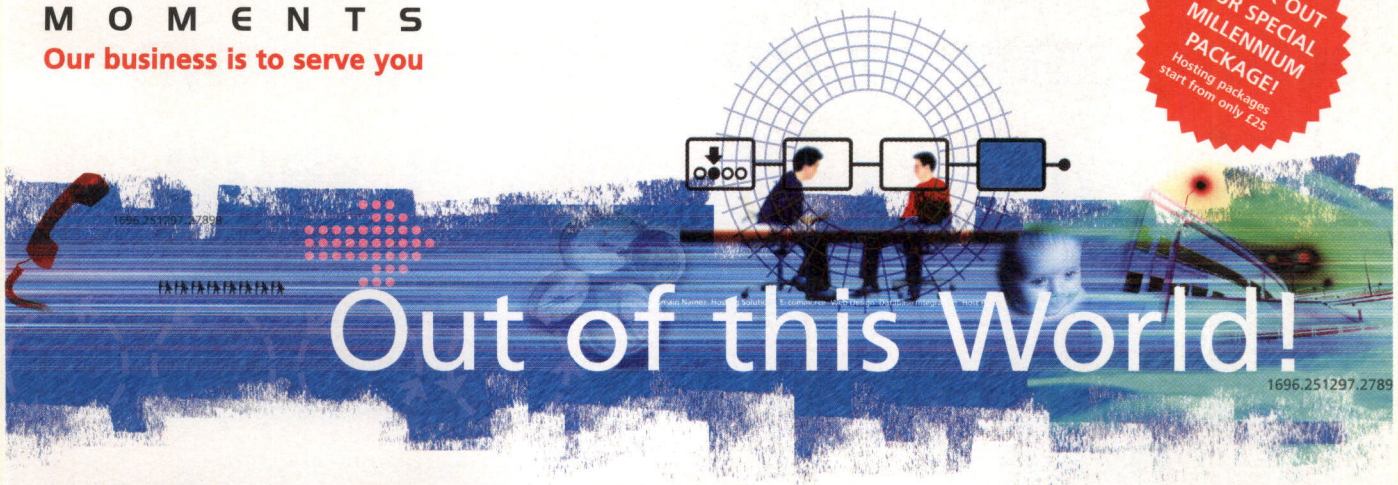

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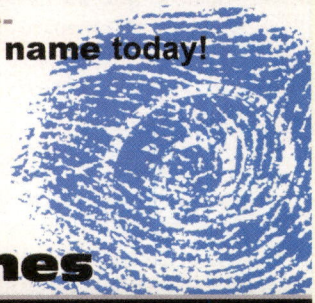

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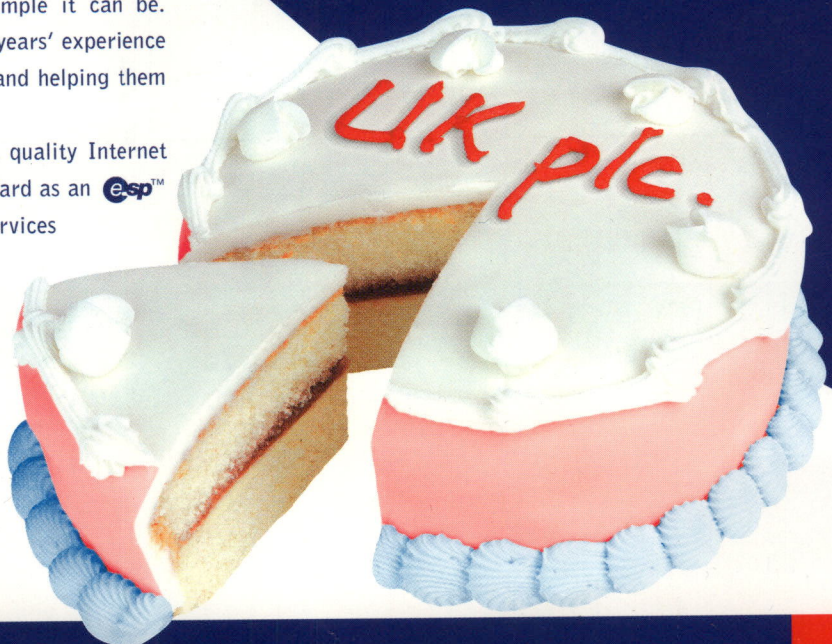

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